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THE OLD COURTYARD

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THE OLD COURTYARD.

BY

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THE OLD COURTYARD.

PROLOGUE.

It was a bright and crisp October morning. The water, as it fell in shining drops into the basin of the little fountain in the midst of the courtyard, seemed to shiver as if it felt the warning of a coming frost; the fuchsia blossoms hung their heads—the poor flowers knew their own time was nearly over, and also they missed the company of the butterflies who usually kept up a merry chase in the sunshine that so often filled the courtyard of the Golden Bear.

Sometimes the canaries in their cages among the vine-arbors and the brilliant-hued butterflies hovering round the flowers seemed to be the only tenants of the old courtyard. To-day three persons stood on the round stones at the mouth of the arched stone passage that led from the courtyard into the place outside the Golden Bear. One of these persons

was a fragile-looking woman, with such sweet dark eyes and a tender mouth. Her eyes were fixed on a fair, handsome young fellow who stood beside her. He wore the French uniform, and Madame de Vos was speaking to him in French.

"The two years will pass more quickly with you than they will with us, my friend." She looked from him at a girl so like her that one guessed at once they were mother and daughter, and one also guessed that Madame de Vos must have married very young. The young girl smiled, first at her mother and then at her lover.

"I think it is worse for Louis, mother, for he will be alone," she said. "I have you and my father—he will have no one in Algeria."

The young soldier's eyes had not left the girl's face. He took her hand in both of his.

"You are right, my best beloved. The days will be very long and the time will pass drearily without my Clemence. Ah, if your father had only consented, I could have got my discharge three months hence." He turned to Madame de Vos—"There is no hope for my Uncle Jules, madame," he said, "and he has told my father that he leaves me everything when he dies."

Madame de Vos looked graver.

"It is not that that influences my husband, dear Louis. He thinks that our Clemence is young enough; he says that in writing to one another in these two years of separation, you will learn to understand one another, and that you will both be happier afterwards for the delay."

Louis Scherer shrugged his shoulders.

"Good-bye," said Madame de Vos. "You will be constantly in our thoughts, my dear son."

He kissed her on both cheeks, and then the tender-hearted woman turned away and loitered by the fountain so as to leave the lovers alone.

Louis drew Clemence within one of the vine-arbors, and put his arm around her.

"My darling, it breaks my heart to leave you;" he kissed her again and again, and she did not shrink from him.

"We will write very often," she whispered.

"And when I come back we will never part again," he answered.

They stood silent, looking into one another's eyes, feeling that they could not part; and then the carillon rang out ten o'clock, and Louis Scherer started.

There was only time to say adieu, and to hurry off to the railway station to join his invalid cap-

tain, who had brought him to the old Flemish city, and also to the Golden Bear. Louis Scherer was an Alsatian, and his parents lived on the frontier, but he had entered the French army when he left college, and the regiment to which he belonged was already on its way to Algiers.

Her mother came to the vine-arbor where Clemence stood still and tearless. Madame de Vos put her arm round her child and fondly kissed her flushed face.

"Courage, dear child," she said. "We will look forward from month to month and they will soon go."

Clemence hid her face on her mother's shoulder. "I believe I am silly," she said. "I felt just now as if I should never see him again. Ah, mother," she raised her head and looked anxiously at the delicate face now turned from her; "you are coughing again. Come in and rest; you have tired yourself for us this morning."

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

AT THE GOLDEN BEAR.

On a hot August morning, in a quaint old town of Flanders, the sun shone brightly into the courtyard of the Golden Bear.

Earlier in the morning the sun had tried to creep in through the low-browed arch that gave entrance to the courtyard from the little place outside it; but the golden light had not succeeded in reaching farther than to the middle of the broad-vaulted entrance-passage—it just gleamed on the steps of the kitchen on the right of this passage; but on the left, Clemence's parlor, the house entrance, and the landlord's bureau just beyond, remained in shadow. The sunshine, however, had not chosen to be baffled by the gray stone archway, so it soon climbed high enough to peep over the quaint roof of the large rambling

building, and poured down an intense glow of golden warmth into the courtyard at the end of the vaulted passage.

The plash-plash of the little fountain tinkled merrily, and its drops shone like diamonds in the sudden brilliance; gold fish darted to the surface of the water to warm themselves; and the leaves of the tree fuchsias round about the basin showered prismatic hues through the sparkling water-drops.

It was a small court, after all, but it was planted like a garden and it was carefully tended; on three sides it was overlooked by the windows of the inn. Rustic arbors bordered it, and these had vines clambering over them which flung out occasional graceful sprays, fresh with green leaves and the slender tendrils. In these arbors round, pink-faced Belgians sat in the afternoons smoking pipes and cigars and drinking beer and coffee. No one was sitting in the arbors this morning. Everything looked as green and as well-ordered as if the gardener only had access there. It was not quite silent; yellow canaries in the harbors sang out loudly as the sunshine gilded their cages; this was all the life; but for the noisy birds and a few peacock butterflies that darted their golden colors

in and out between the tall fuchsias, the courtyard basked in the sunshine in its own still fashion. The small round paving-stones became hotter and hotter, and the spray of the fountain dried as soon as it splashed to them.

The quiet scene seemed to be waiting for an actor to move across it.

There was a glass door between the two arbors that faced the vaulted passage. This door opened, and old Madame de Vos came forward into the courtyard primly quilled.

"Pouf!" she shook her cap. "This heat will stifle me."

She pulled the large hood of her long black cloak over her cap till she left only the snowy muslin strings in sight, and waddled across the courtyard as fast as she could to the welcome shade of the passage.

"Elodie, Elodie," she cried loudly, "where, then, is Mademoiselle Clemence?"

No answer coming, Madame de Vos went on to the kitchen door.

It stood open, and through the doorway glowed a dull stifling heat, hotter than the sunshine in the courtyard, for this heat was reflected again and again with interest from the brass pans and pots

of all shapes and sizes that hung glittering on the walls.

Everything shone nobly within the kitchen except Elodie's face, and that was pale and thin and matched fittingly with her small, erect body. The cook wore the same sort of snowy cap that Madame de Vos did, but here all likeness between the two ended. The bulky, pink-faced dame who filled up the kitchen doorway would have made three such women as the slight active cook of the Golden Bear.

It was curious to contrast Elodie's peaked chin above the large, carefully tied bows of her cap strings, with the triple rows of pink fat which seemed to rest on Madame's snowy puffs of white muslin.

"Heavens! was there ever before such heat! Pouf!" The fat-faced old lady turned up her pale blue eyes as if they also suffered.

"Well, then! Why does madame come into it; there is no need." Elodie spoke very gravely over one shoulder,—she was busy trussing fowls for the *tāble d'hôte*.

"Where is Mademoiselle Clemence, I say? I want her."

"Here I am, grandmother? What do you want?"

There were three doors on the left side of the passage facing the kitchen. The largest was the entrance to the inn, and on either side of it were the landlord's counting-house and his daughter's parlor. Clemence's fresh soft voice came from this last doorway.

"Come here, child, come, and then Elodie can hear the news at the same time. Ah! What have I done that all the family affairs should be thus thrust on my shoulders; yes, this is indeed trying news." She heaved her shoulders, which certainly looked broad enough to carry a goodly store.

Elodie turned sharply round, her withered face full of interest, while Clemence crossed the passage; a glad, dancing light showed in the girl's eyes, and a soft flush rose in her cheeks.

A minute ago Clemence could hardly have been called pretty; she had looked so pale, and her large thoughtful eyes had wanted color till the flush on her cheeks made them glow.

"Well, child, your aunt, Sister Marie, is ill in her convent at Bruges, and the superior writes to say that one of us must go to her directly. What is to be done? It would kill me to go, Clemence;

you know I could not travel in such heat; besides, how could I leave the Golden Bear while your father is away? You must go, Clemence; you only can obey this summons. Read the letter, child."

The liquid eyes drooped, the soft warm flush faded out of the girl's face, and she stood silent, her lips parted, her hands clasped together.

"Well?" This came very impatiently from Madame.

"Grandmother!" the warm blood came rushing into Clemence's face, and her words were quickly spoken. "I cannot go to Aunt Marie; you know why I wish to stay at home—Louis said in his letter that he might arrive at any moment to-day or to-morrow, and I must be here. I—I have not seen him all these months. Where is Rosalie,—why cannot she go to Bruges?"

Madame de Vos shrugged her broad shoulders.

"Bah! Rosalie is a mere child; what use could she be to Sister Marie. It is useless to send Rosalie."

"But we are not sent for to be useful." Clemence pleaded, while she kept her large tender eyes fixed on the unyielding face. "The good sisters love my aunt too well to give her up to the nursing of a stranger. They would not let me

nurse her if I went to the convent. The letter says: "We wish her to see one of her own people again." Dear grandmother, I have not seen Aunt Marie for so—so long, if she saw me she would not easily recognize me. Rosalie has been with her five years. She has only now left her, and Aunt Marie loves Rosalie dearly. Send her to Bruges, grandmother; how could I be absent when Louis arrives?"

The sweet, imploring voice might have touched the grandmother's heart through all the pink fat which incased it, but Madame de Vos hated contradiction, and it had struck her while the girl spoke that Clemence looked more than ever like her dead mother. Clemence had the slender, graceful figure, the transparent skin and dark hair, and above all the strange earnestness in the eyes and the resolute, fervent spirit which had in days gone by so bewildered Madame de Vos when she contemplated her son's wife.

Madame de Vos senior came of a pure Flemish stock. Her body and mind were alike solid and stolid. No member of her family had been slender or poor or dark-haired, neither had they shown their feelings in their faces; she had therefore felt herself aggrieved when Auguste de Vos, her eldest

son, the landlord of the flourishing inn, the Golden Bear, had married Clemence de Trudin, the orphan daughter of a poor French gentleman. A love marriage, too, on both sides.

What could be expected but that which had already happened? What could her son expect of such a transparent, unusual-looking creature? Only a year ago the younger Madame de Vos had died of decline—a disease caused, her mother-in-law said, by a dislike of eating and drinking, and fondness for reading.

Well, the sweet woman was dead, and her sorrowing idolizing husband was left with his four children to mourn the blank left in his life.

Clemence was then twenty-two, and M. de Vos thought that she could take her mother's place in the management of her two little brothers, but, before he could rouse himself to settle anything he got an imperative summons to visit his mother at Louvain. "What can you be thinking of, Anguste," she said, when on his arrival he told her of his plans for the future. "Of what use can Clemence be, I ask? Is she not betrothed to the Lieutenant, Louis Scherer? And who can say how soon that young man may purchase his discharge and come home and marry her? And then

I should like you to tell me, my son, what will happen?" She laughed as she saw a look of consternation in his eyes. "Aha, my Auguste, it is indeed fortunate that you have a mother to think for you: yes, yes." She rubbed her soft pink hands. "That child, Rosalie, is already beautiful, and only sixteen years old; she will be lovely as a picture before long. Do you think, my son, that it will be fitting to bring up a beauty like that at the Golden Bear with no better mentor than your cook, Elodie? Bah—that is what it is to be a man!"

When a man has dearly loved his wife, so dearly that life and everything belonging to it have lost interest and flavor after she has left him, he is easily managed; and Auguste de Vos, being a dutiful son, began to see, after a few more maternal exhortations, that it might be well for his girls if their grandmother took up her abode at the Auri d'Or. He naturally did not call to mind his mother's faults; he had not seen much of her since his marriage; and his wife had rarely grieved him by complaint of the petty unkindnesses she had had to suffer during the old lady's visits.

Madame de Vos had never forgiven the dark-eyed wife's want of fortune, and she had to the

end reminded her daughter-in-law that she was the only wife of a de Vos who had not enriched her husband.

Now, as she stood looking at Clemence the old dislike remained a dislike which had become intensified by her son's blind devotion to his wife.

"Just like her mother," thought the grandmother, then aloud and severely:

"Clemence, you talk follies—you are the oldest, and you must go to Bruges."

"Why need any one go to-day?" Elodie had left her fowl-trussing, and she stood upright with her hands behind her, looking at Madame de Vos. "The master will be home to-night; he will go to-morrow morning to Bruges, and he will take Mademoiselle Rosalie, and she can stay with Sister Marie till the poor soul recovers—(or dies)," she said under her breath. "There, it is settled."

The pink on the old lady's face deepened, but she spoke as slowly as ever.

"Chut! You are not a mother, Elodie; it is not possible for you to know a mother's feelings. My daughter, my beloved Marie, must not be kept waiting to humor the fancies of a love-sick girl. Fie, then, Clemence, I am ashamed of you; when I was young my loves came after me; they waited

my pleasure; I did not neglect my duties to wait for them. Fie, then."

Madame de Vos walked away to the parlor without waiting for an answer.

Clemence's eyes sparkled.

"It is too unjust, too hard; if only my father was at home;" she said this to herself, but Elodie was studying her face.

The old servant put her lean brown hand on the girl's shoulder.

"Go to Bruges, dear child," she said. "The grandmother is well able to go herself, and we could do without her; but if Sister Marie should become worse you would grieve that you had not obeyed the summons to her bedside. Go then, at once, Mademoiselle, and who knows but that you may be able to come back this evening or early to-morrow."

Here the savor of the various stew-pans on the charcoal stoves within the kitchen warned the cook that she must return to her duties; and to tell the truth she thought her young mistress was over-anxious about her lover's arrival.

"Well, well," she said, cheerfully, Monsieur Louis will not return to-day, I am sure of it; the sooner you go the sooner you come home," and

she went back to her stew-pans. Elodie was, however, still sore with Madame de Vos, and she therefore gave a sharp scolding to the man and the maid who served under her, and who had been idling during her short absence.

CHAPTER II.

ROSALIE DE VOS.

PLASH, plash went the diamond drops of the fountain; the canaries sang louder than ever, and the gold fish seemed to be listening, for they came to the top of the water and opened their wide mouths as if to say, "Bravo."

Presently the glass door opened again; this time it was not old Madame de Vos who came out into the sunshine. It was a fair, plump, but well-grown maiden, with golden hair wreathed in abundant plaits round her pretty little head. A very sweet and blooming creature—the bloom and sweetness of seventeen, that indescribable and sparkling charm of youth which fades so quickly, which a little extra sunshine withers out of the spring flowers. The soft, liquid-blue eyes, the delicate peach-tinted cheeks, the smooth white texture of the round throat with its exquisite creases, the firm, rosy lips,—all told of youth in its first freshness, and in Rosalie

de Vos of youth conscious of its own beauty and eager to try its power.

She looked about her, then, gathering a sprig of fuchsia, she fastened it at her throat, and with a soft sigh of content she seated herself in the corner of one of the arbors.

"It is nice to be at home again," she said to herself. "Why, I was only twelve years old when I went to Bruges; what a baby I was;" she sat smiling, looking prettier than ever as a little roguish dimple showed on her cheek. "Home is certainly not so dull as our convent was. But, dear me, it might be much livelier, oh, ever so much. Why need our rooms be shut off from the rest of the house so that we never get a chance of seeing the people who stay here; and why does Clemence say that I should not come out here after one o'clock?" She stretched out her arms and yawned. "It is so provoking to be so near to life and new faces and to be forever shut up with grandmother and Clemence." She yawned again. It was too hot to stir out of the arbor or she would have crossed over to the passage so as to look into the place at the further end of it.

"Oh, dear, it is duller than I thought: at the convent I had my lessons, and they filled up the

time; there was embroidery, too, that had to be done; but here I needn't do anything, and I have no one to talk to; it is very well for Clemence,—she has a lover, and she is twenty-three ! How old she is ! I wonder what kind of a man Louis Scherer can be to care to marry so old a *fiancé*. He must be ugly or stupid, I fancy."

The dining-room was beyond the kitchen, detached from the rest of the house; it could only be entered from the courtyard itself.

The clock struck one, and a sound of voices came up the arched passage.

"What does it matter?" Rosalie thought. "Clemence and my father are both away; there is none to mount guard; I shall stay. I am going to amuse myself." She smiled brightly. "Grandmamma never scolds me; the trellis makes a famous screen; I can see every one and no one sees me"—she shrank into her corner behind the vine leaves.

The dinner bell began to ring loudly, and from thirty to forty guests came trooping into the courtyard, some from the inn and some from the place outside—they all, however, had hungry, expectant faces, for the *table d'hôte* of the Golden Bear had a reputation.

Alphonse, the stout head waiter, asked the oldest of the guests to preside in his master's absence, and then, when the soup was served, he proceeded with calm solemnity to compound the salad dressing.

The windows of the dining-room looked into the courtyard, and Alphonse stood facing them. Just as he was putting the finishing stroke, the vinegar, he started, and at least a double quantity of acid flowed into the thick yellow cream of which he was so proud.

No wonder Alphonse started. With such a dinner going on as no inn in the town except the Golden Bear could boast of, an individual—a military man, too, by his walk—instead of hurrying into the salle as fast as possible (for the first course was almost done), this individual was deliberately crossing the courtyard in an opposite direction; he was making for one of the arbors.

Alphonse started and shook his head. Such an act was incredible, and meantime the salad was ruined.

Rosalie saw the stranger as he came out of the arched passage, and she started; he was coming straight towards her, and it was pleasant to the young girl to feel that she was more attractive

than the savory fumes escaping from the open windows of the dining-room. But when the visitor came up to her, he bowed and stepped back. "I beg pardon, Mademoiselle," he said, in a formal tone, "I could not see plainly through the leaves; I mistook you for Mademoiselle de Vos."

Before Rosalie could answer, he bowed again and said "Pardon me," and went away.

Rosalie was vexed and mortified. "Fancy mistaking me for Clemence;" then she paused and knitted her pretty eyebrows. "How comes he to know Clemence, I wonder? Did he come to see our father on business, and finding him out did he come to look for Clemence? No, that cannot be; if he asked Elodie as he passed, she must have told him that my sister has gone to Bruges. I must go to tell grandmother; I want to know who he is —he is so handsome."

She was not daring enough to cross the courtyard,—that would have brought her in full view of the dining-room windows, so she slipped out of the arbor and into the house by the glass door, then up a back staircase which led to the family sleeping-rooms, and then down another staircase which led into Clemence's parlor.

"I say, grandmother—" Rosalie stopped;—the

handsome stranger sat talking to her grandmother. He seemed to be quite at home.

"Come in, my treasure," her grandmother said in a caressing tone. "Monsieur Louis, this is our Rosalie, whom you have never seen; she is the flower of our house. Eh! Rosalie, dear child; this is Monsieur Louis Scherer."

The old woman looked from the blushing maiden and the handsome soldier. "Heaven," she said to herself, "what a beautiful couple they would make."

Louis Scherer thought his future sister-in-law very pretty, and his looks said so while he shook hands with her. Madame de Vos smiled approvingly, and she pinched Rosalie's hot cheek as the girl stood beside her flushed with surprise and confusion.

"You are thinking, Monsieur Louis, that the two sisters are not alike, and you are right. Clemence is a de Trudin in every way, but this child is a true de Vos—I should rather say Rosalie is a van Noorus, for she takes after my family absolutely. She reproduces my mother—we have always been fair and blue-eyed. Ah, yes, yes; we were always pink and white and plump: it is sad when a race degenerates!" She sighed deeply,

but Louis Scherer did not answer, but kept on looking at Rosalie as if he could never tire of her face.

"Grandmother," the girl said, softly, "have you told Monsieur Scherer where Clemence is?"

"Yes, yes, sweet child, I have told Monsieur Scherer all about it. When your father returns he will settle what had best be done; and now we will eat if dinner is ready."

The dinner was served in a room behind the parlor, and while Madame de Vos did full justice to every dish, Louis Scherer began to talk to Rosalie.

"How is it that I never saw you before?" he said, when dinner was over.

"I have been at the convent at Bruges these five years, and I only came home in the winter; you went away before my holidays came. Were you here long?"

She looked up at him, but his full admiring gaze made her blush again.

"We were here six weeks or so." He spoke carelessly; since he had seen Rosalie, that time seemed to have become very far off indeed.

"Do you write to Clemence very often?" she said, saucily, and then to herself—"Clemence will

come home to morrow, and then he will have no time to talk to me; I shall make hay while I can."

"Do I write often? Oh, yes, I think so," but his tone sounded indifferent; he sat pulling his fair moustache while he kept his eyes fixed on Rosalie.

The young girl glanced at her grandmother. The heat and the dinner had together proved overpowering. Madame de Vos nodded in her chair. Rosalie looked frankly up into Louis, eyes and laughed.

"Why does Mademoiselle laugh?" He drew his chair nearer hers.

"I do not know. You make me laugh; I cannot help it."

Louis Scherer felt ruffled; he repeated his question more earnestly. "Will not Mademoiselle answer me?" he added.

Rosalie sat blushing and smiling till Louis Scherer thought he had never seen anyone so distractingly lovely.

"You will think me silly, Monsieur," she said at last, "but there was an old sister at Bruges—Sister Martha,—and she used to talk to us about men: she said they were ogres, and that we must beware of them always, and—and—"

"And you consider me an ogre. Thank you for your good opinion, Mademoiselle." He tried to look very serious.

"No, no, no; I did not say that." She pouted her pretty lips in a coaxing fashion—she was afraid she had affronted him, and she wanted him to go on talking to her. "I was only wondering," she said, demurely, "whether all the men in the world look as hard at people as—as you looked at me just now. It is perhaps for that reason that Sister Martha says men are ogres." She laughed out so joyously, so like a child, that he could not feel aggravated.

"I ask a thousand pardons, Mademoiselle," and he bowed; then he bent over the laughing girl and whispered, "It is your own fault if I look too much."

The words, or else the tone in which they were spoken, flushed Rosalie's face more deeply than ever; her eyes drooped till the golden lashes touched her hot cheeks; for a moment her sauciness deserted her. It soon came back.

"Why do you call me Mademoiselle? It seems to me absurd when we shall so soon be brother and sister."

Louis Scherer rose abruptly; he went to the window and looked out into the courtyard.

"Come," he said, "we will go and sit in one of the arbors."

Rosalie pouted and looked vexed.

"You can go, but I cannot. I may only sit out there in the morning."

"Every morning!" he looked at her over his shoulder: "I wish it were morning then,—I want to see you sitting there again."

"Why?"

"Aha, that is a secret. You would only laugh at me if I told you what you seemed like, sitting there just now."

"In that arbor? And I never guessed who you were when I saw you coming across to me. How could I guess it was you? I had fancied that Clemence's lover was quite—quite a different person."

"What kind of a man had you fancied he was?—tell me," and he bent over her.

"No, Monsieur," she shook her pretty head; "that is just what I shall not tell you. If I did—you—you—would perhaps find out what I think of you now."

"And what do you think of me now?"

As they stood together in the window, Rosalie rested her arms on the cushioned ledge, and Scherer

was bending so closely over her that his face nearly touched her hair. She felt too happy to answer his question.

"Hem!" said a sharp voice behind them, and they started apart. Elodie stood near the door with a plateful of cakes in her hand. There was a gloomy look on the face of the cook of the Golden Bear; she turned to sleepy Madame de Vos, who had opened her eyes and sat yawning.

"I have brought these cakes," Elodie said, stiffly. "I told Alphonso to bring them in for dessert, but the booby forgot them. They are the cakes which Mademoiselle likes, so I have made them to-day for Monsieur Louis. Good day, sir; I hope you are well?" but Elodie did not smile as she greeted the young soldier.

Madame de Vos roused herself.

"Yes, yes, Elodie, that was a good thought; the cakes are excellent. You remember Elodie, Monsieur Louis?"

Louis Scherer had already nodded; now he said a few words of thanks. But the cook did not smile at him; she went back muttering to her kitchen. Something had put Elodie out of temper this afternoon.

CHAPTER III.

A FALSE POSITION.

TOWARDS evening the air cooled. Louis Scherer went and smoked in one of the arbors, while Rosalie lamented that the parlor window looked out at the side of the house. She could no longer see him. She stood drumming her fingers on the glass, or else she walked up and down like a restless animal. She felt impatient with everyone. Even her indulgent grandmother was forced at last to rebuke the girl's idleness.

"Ma foi, Rosalie, what ails you?" she said; "see, I have done six long rows of knitting while you have been tramping up and down. I thought they taught you to embroider at the convent; let me see how you do it."

"Very well, I will get my work." Rosalie looked sulky, but she opened the door that led to

the staircase. As she did so, the door leading into the passage opened, and in came Louis Scherer.

Rosalie turned back and let the door close again.

"Madame," the young fellow said politely to Madame de Vos, "it is so cool and pleasant now outside that I hope you will allow me to escort you and your granddaughter. Shall we not take a little walk beside the canal?"

The old lady smiled, but she shook her head. "You are a charming fellow," she said, "and your offer is very kind, but I never take walks—my health would not support such a fatigue; and, beside, we expect my son, Auguste, in a few minutes; he will like to find us all together."

Louis bowed.

"I will then wait with you to receive him, if I may be permitted to do so, Madame."

"That is as it should be," the old lady said, graciously. She looked at Rosalie, and she saw that the girl's restlessness had subsided. She had seated herself, and was looking happy and peaceful.

"It is a pity that Clemence cannot remain in the convent," her grandmother thought; "what a well-matched pair these would make."

"What have you been doing this afternoon?" Louis was saying to Rosalie.

"I? Oh nothing. And you?"

"I have been very busy; I have smoked two cigars, I have drunk a bottle of beer, and I have also had a nap out there in the arbor."

She laughed. "Some people would call that idleness, but I see you are of my opinion, that life should be full of enjoyment."

He looked at her admiringly. "Yes, you would always enjoy everything, and you would make others enjoy life also."

She pouted, and her eyes looked sad.

"Ah, you don't know how dull I felt this morning," she said.

"Before I came, or after?"

But Rosalie did not answer. There was a sound of wheels in the courtyard, and horses' feet came stamping on its hard round stone pavement. Madame de Vos bustled to the door, and her granddaughter ran to open it. There was much kissing on both cheeks between son and mother and father and daughter, and then Louis Scherer came forward and shook hands with Auguste de Vos, the landlord of the Golden Bear.

De Vos was a fine, portly man of middle height,

with broad shoulders and a frank, sensible face; he had a look of his mother, but, instead of her small, hard blue eyes, the son's were dark, deep-set and full of kindly expression. He greeted Louis Scherer heartily; he was delighted to see the man Clemence loved. He was disturbed when he learned her absence, but he said less than Madame de Vos expected. He decided mentally to go and fetch Clemence home to-morrow, for he had found out long ago his mother always got the best of him in argument, and, much as he loved her, he did not always trust her judgment when his best-beloved child was in question.

Rosalie and her grandmother soon went to bed, and then the two men sat and smoked in silence.

At last Auguste de Vos rose from his chair.

"We are both tired to-night, my friend, after our journeys," he said, "we had better leave the business to be discussed till to-morrow. There is a good deal to settle, you know. In your letter to me, announcing that you had purchased your discharge, you asked that the marriage should take place a fortnight after your return here. Well, it can be as you wish; you and Clemence had better fix the day between you, the rest concerns me. I will fetch my daughter home to-morrow."

"Yes," Louis said, and then he stood silent. De Vos waited for him to speak again, but seemingly the young fellow was very busy putting his pipe into its case.

"Well, good-night, Scherer," de Vos said, at last; "I am giving you the best thing I have to give. If I had known two years ago all that was going to happen, it is possible you would not have got my consent so easily."

The tremor in the full, strong voice moved the young soldier.

"Thank you: I will try to deserve her," he said, and he held out his hand. "Good-night, Monsieur de Vos."

When Louis Scherer came downstairs next morning, he found Monsieur de Vos and his mother drinking their coffee in Clemence's parlor, and the landlord's frank, manly face looked troubled.

"Ah, my friend," (he shook hands with Louis), "I have had news for you. I have a letter from our Clemence; she is to stay till the end of the week with her aunt. My sister is very ill, I fear. It appears possible that she may recover, and meanwhile Clemence's presence comforts her. Still," he smiled as he looked at Louis, "I do not

pretend to say what may happen when Clemence hears that you are here. She may come home at once, eh?"

Madame de Vos had sat silent; now she opened her dull blue eyes till they were quite round. "Bah! my son, why need Clemence hear about anything to disturb her. She promised to perform this duty, and she will keep her word. Is it not, then, unkind to disturb her? If she learns that Monsieur Scherer is here, who knows she may fret to return home, and that will do her harm. It is always wise to let well enough alone."

De Vos looked at Scherer. To his surprise the young fellow made no answer; he seemed to be absorbed in drinking his coffee. In came Rosalie, fresh and blooming. She made many pretty excuses for being late as she bent down to be kissed by her grandmother.

"Little lazy one," the old woman said, fondly. "But here is something to employ you Rosalie; you will have to help me amuse Monsieur Louis till Clemence comes home,—she stays at Bruges till the end of the week."

De Vos got up from the breakfast-table, and nodded smilingly to the three.

"Arrange it among yourselves," he said. "I must go to my bureau, and leave you idle ones to your play till dinner-time."

Scherer looked after him with an irresolute expression. Just then Elodie came in to clear away breakfast, and Madame de Vos settled herself in her arm-chair and began her everlasting roll of knitting.

The young man cleared his throat nervously, and Madame de Vos looked up at him.

"I must say good-bye, Madame," he hesitated, "I think of leaving you to-day; Clemence being absent, I am not wanted here. I am going to Alost to visit my father and mother. They have settled there during my absence. I have not seen them for two years." There was a little pause, during which his three listeners digested his words, each after her own fashion.

Elodie gave an approving nod. "Good youth," she said to herself. "He finds no pleasure in the household that our Clemence is not with."

There was quite a genial smile on her wrinkled face as she carried away the coffee-pot and table-cloth.

Rosalie's firm, full lips pouted redder than ever. "He shall not go," she thought; "I have been

counting on these four days, and I shall not lose the chance of amusing myself."

The grandmother's eyes opened yet wider, and her pale colored eyebrows went up into her forehead.

"Leave us to-day—leave us because Clemence is away," she said to herself. "Did anybody ever hear such nonsense? That foolish fellow does not know what he is saying. Well, well, my Rosalie must open his eyes."

"You are going away! Surely, that would be too unreasonable, my dear friend;" she laid her fat hand on his coat sleeve. "No, you must not go away; my son would think we had offended you. Besides, how can we tell whether Clemence may not return sooner, and how could we explain your absence. Think how disappointed she would be. Ah, tell me a little, how could we explain your going away, eh, Rosalie? but her granddaughter stood bending over some flowers.

The fair-faced, happy-looking young fellow was troubled, and trouble was a new and uncomfortable sensation to Louis Scherer.

His father was a Frenchman, and he had taken service as a French soldier. Till now he had managed to get through life without trouble. He was

extravagant, and he certainly had got into debt more than once, but his good old father had arranged those troubles for him; they had never become lasting cares. Louis was an only child and his parents idolized him. He had always found plenty of friends among his comrades, and women had unfailingly smiled on him.

Till he saw Clemence de Vos he had always sunned himself like a butterfly in these smiles, caring nothing for the meaning that might be attached to the flattery which he gave so readily in exchange. He had flirted most faithlessly. But when the captain of the company to which he belonged fell ill, he came away on furlough with him to this old Flemish city. The captain, when he got better, took Scherer one day with him to the Golden Bear and introduced him to his cousin, the younger Madame de Vos. She liked the young fellow and asked him to repeat his visit, and then Louis fell in love with her daughter, Clemence.

He soon found that attraction for him was quite irresistible; there was something more than a mere pretty face in the daughter of the landlord of the Golden Bear; it may have been, too, that the secret of Clemence's power lay in her indifference to the flattery which he had always found so successful

with other young women. She was not easily won; but at last Louis Scherer came to Madame de Vos and begged her to induce her husband to receive him as Clemence's suitor. Scherer had a frank, pleasant manner which won its way through all reserve and prejudice; but Auguste idolized his daughter, and wanted to be sure that the man she had chosen was entirely worthy of her. He considered that Scherer was too young and too frivolous to marry at present. He said, however, that if he was in the same mind at the end of two years, he would listen to his proposal. But his wife pleaded hard for her young countryman, and de Vos gave way at last against his own judgment; when the young fellow's company was ordered to Algeria, he consented to the betrothal.

So far Scherer's faith had stood the test; the two years were over, and he had come to claim his bride. But to-day he felt sorely troubled.

Rosalie's face had haunted him all night, and when she came down to breakfast he saw that she was even lovelier than he had pictured her, and as fresh as a morning sunbeam. He became more and more disturbed, and when he heard Madame de Vos call on Rosalie to help in amusing him, it seemed to him that the only refuge from so exqui-

sitely dangerous a trial of his good faith, lay in flight. He knew he should be all right again when Clemence came back. Clemence's sweetness and truth would make him feel calm and peaceful.

Just then he looked up; Rosalie's fair head was still bent over her flowers, but he could see her profile and the mutinous curves of her pretty lips. All at once Scherer's perplexity left him. Why should he not stay at the Golden Bear till Clemence came? It was surely the most natural course to take.

"Alphonse! Elodie!" cried Madame le Vos, "run, run as fast as you can—the goat, the thief—ah," and she waddled out of the parlor into the passage, and thence into the courtyard, and charged a big white goat, which stood diligently nibbling the vine leaves, with the ball of worsted on the end of her knitting-pin.

Presently Rosalie turned round. She gave a little start at the sight of Louis Scherer. "I thought you had gone, too," she said. She was smiling, and Scherer felt piqued.

"Do you want to get rid of me?" he said, in an embarrassed tone.

"I? You must think me very rude, I fear. One always wishes a guest to stay, does not one?"

"You are truly polite," he bowed ceremoniously. "It is then only from courtesy that you have been kind to me."

Rosalie fixed her bright eyes on him, and then she laughed.

"What is the matter?" she said; "you were much nicer yesterday,—take care or I shall tell Clemence that you can look quite cross. I vow, I felt frightened just now."

"Tell me," he bent over her as he spoke, "tell me truly, do you wish me to stay or to go away."

"How can you ask?" she said gaily. "I had no one but grandmamma to speak to before you came; I love to be amused."

"Well, then," he said, looking at her and twirling the ends of his fair mustache, "it is a bargain. I will stay and amuse you, if you will sit with me in the arbor every morning and every evening when no one is there."

Rosalie nodded and kissed her fingers to him, and then ran away to help her grandmother with the goat.

CHAPTER IV.

CLEMENCE COMES BACK.

FOUR days passed away. On the evening of the fifth day Clemence stood once more under the gray archway of the Golden Bear. Her face had a chastened look on it. In the quiet convent room at Bruges she had seen so much of the real beauty of life—patience, sweetness, self-denying endurance, and above all, so cheerful and loving a conformity to ills and trials, that she asked herself now, as she stood ready to enter once more into the distractions of the outer world, which was true happiness, enjoyment to the full of the good things of this life, or the ineffable peace and sweetness that she had seen in the pale eyes of the suffering Sister Marie.

The sunlight had faded, but its heat lingered yet. All was still within the archway. Elodie was not in her kitchen: on the other side the parlor door stood open. There was none within.

Clemence felt glad to be alone. She went on into the courtyard.

There was still light there, but the birds had left off singing; the little fountain plashed quietly into the stone basin and the gnats hummed everywhere; there was a sort of luxury in the repose of the place. All at once this hush was broken. A low murmuring of voices came from the arbor at the farthest end of the courtyard. Clemence looked around, the clustering vine leaves hid the faces of the speakers, but she saw Rosalie's blue gown.

Clemence guessed that her father was with Rosalie, and a childish thought came to her, "I will surprise them," she said.

She crept noiselessly to the arbor and peeped through the vine leaves. Rosalie's head was turned away as she stood opposite her companion, but his face, full of glowing happiness, was towards Clemence—it was not her father; it was Louis Scherer.

A little cry escaped Clemence. The others started in the sudden surprise; it seemed only a second, and then Louis Scherer was standing beside Clemence and was kissing her. Later on,

when Auguste de Vos came in to supper, Rosalie was missing.

"The poor child has a headache," the grandmother said. "By-the-bye, Clemence has come home."

The good father went joyfully into the courtyard to find the lovers. The moonlight had silvered the fountain, but it left off playing.

Monsieur de Vos held his daughter in a long, fond embrace. He knew that in the future he could not expect to be that which he had lately been to Clemence. The remembrance of her watchful tenderness towards him ever since his deep sorrow thrilled in his voice and manner to-night, though he tried to speak gaily.

"Well, young folks, is the day fixed?" Clemence slipped her hand under her father's arm.

"We have not spoken of it yet," Louis answered.

"There is no hurry, my friend, so far as I am concerned. You need not think we want to lose our Clemence."

He pressed her hand with his arm.

"If Clemence will consent"—Louis began to speak very fast, he seemed to be hurrying out his words. "I think it is well to keep to the old plan we

made, you and I, before I went away. Let us fix our marriage for this day fortnight."

"That is right, Louis, quite right," de Vos said heartily. "First pledges should never be broken; it is weak and frivolous to alter anything without reason."

The brave father had striven to put willingness into his voice, but the girl's little hand lying so near his heart felt it heave as if a strong suppressed sob was kept prisoned there and wanted to get out.

Rosalie came down late to breakfast next morning, pale and heavy-eyed.

"Eh?" her father said. "What ails you, child, You go out too much in the sunshine," and then he went on reading his newspaper.

The lovers were talking together at the window when Elodie came in. She gave a look full of angry meaning at Madame de Vos.

The fulness of her joy made Clemence selfish this morning. She could think only of Louis, and she followed him out into the courtyard without even looking at Rosalie.

One understands how precious an offering was "the first fruits."

What second joy is there which equals the first?

The first view of mountain scenery, of the sea, the yearly joy of the first day of spring, and the most intense of all, the day first of reunion after separation. All these have ecstasy in them as fleeting as breath on a mirror, as the glory of the rainbow.

To-day Clemence seemed to walk on air. As she stepped out into the flood of sunshine, the birds were singing one against another; every sparklet of the fountain seemed to bid her welcome, and all the flowers glowed with color.

"Shall we go towards the old abbey?" Louis said.

"I should like it—I will get my hat;" she smiled at him and ran away upstairs.

She had hardly patience to put on her hat in her joy and excitement, and every moment robbed from the delight of his presence seemed to her trebled in length.

She was hurrying downstairs when the door of her grandmother's room opened.

"Come here, Clemence," Madame de Vos said, "I have only wool enough for to-day; you will get me some more, child; you can easily pass Schmelger's shop in the Marche aux Grains. Do not forget my wool. And, stay, I will seek all the

patterns; I must get my bags. Stay, stay while I look for them. Where are they?"

Clemence answered hurriedly, "Louis is waiting for me; we are going out, grandmother, and if you have enough for to-day I will manage to get you some for to-morrow this evening. Good-bye, now!"

She ran away and an unpleasant smile came into the grandmother's face.

"Louis is waiting, is he?" she said. "He is not in a hurry, I'll warrant. He would be content to wait all day so long as he had my Rosalie to talk to. How can this end? It can only produce misery; well, well." She began to knit rapidly. "I must question Rosalie—I must see how far things have gone with the sweet angel, and then if it is as I believe I must make these foolish children happy in the way I consider best suited to them. Yes, I am the most fitting judge of what is best." She nodded with much complacence and went on rapidly with her knitting.

When Clemence came in from her walk she looked changed. A cloud had come over the sunshine of her happiness; it shadowed her face, and yet she could not say whence this shadow had come.

"Am I exacting?" she said, as she stood taking off her hat, "do I expect too much joy from mere human life? What does this troubled longing mean?" She paused while her thoughts searched deeper, then with a sigh—"Perhaps I have exaggerated. In these long months of absence I have dreamed over his words and his looks till I have made them out to be more tender, more—I cannot even say what I want in them. I don't know what it is I miss."

She buried her face between her hands.

"It is ungrateful to murmur; he is very kind and thoughtful for me. Oh, what is this that has come over me? Am I growing wicked?"

There was a look of terror in the sweet earnest eyes as she suddenly raised her head and pushed her hair from her forehead.

"Just now, when he insisted I was tired, I fancied he said it to shorten our walk because he was tired of me, or is it this," a calmer look came into her troubled face, "is it that all earthly joy is unsatisfactory and that this feeling is sent me thus early to wean me from desiring it?" She stood thinking. "No," she said, "it is not that. Even Sister Marie said I ought to think much of Louis and of his love, and I must. It seems to me that

he is my all, the very sun of my life; how ungrateful I am! What have I been doing—blaming him for want of love? I suppose that is what I really mean."

She went downstairs, but she was still heavy-hearted; her trouble seemed to have increased instead of being soothed by self-communing.

At dinner-time every one was grave and preoccupied except Rosalie—she had regained her spirits, and she kept up an incessant flow of talk.

Clemence tried hard to feel at ease, but her lover's downcast face checked her; she felt embarrassed when she spoke to him.

When they all went into the parlor, she told herself she fancied things.

"My father was as silent as any of us," she said, "both he and Louis are doubtless thinking about our future life. How grateful I ought to be to have a place in the thoughts of two such good men. I must conquer this disquiet, or Louis will notice it."

But when night came and the sisters went to their respective rooms, they both cried themselves to sleep.

Rosalie was full of wild grief at the injustice that was being committed. Louis loved her best,

she knew he did, and yet he would break her heart by marrying her sister. On that evening when Clemence had found them together in the arbor although Scherer had not actually professed to love Rosalie, he had drawn the ardent, indiscreet girl on to a sudden half-confession she loved him—a love which the poor vehement child told herself to-night, amid her sobs, Louis Scherer had been trying to make her feel ever since his arrival at the Golden Bear.

It is possible that some girls would not have attained this knowledge, but Rosalie's over-mastering vanity saved her from the reproach of having sought Louis.

"I shall die of sorrow," she said, as she lay sobbing in the moonlight, "and then perhaps he, and Clemence too, will be sorry. I dare say they will cry together over my grave when it is too late."

Clemence too had cried at first, but now she lay calm and sad, with eyes widely opened, trying to regain her lost peace.

What was this that had come to her—did she doubt Louis? And then she reminded herself that the character of all others she had most disliked was that of a jealous woman.

And yet she was not jealous. She did not dream

that her lover's faith had gone astray to another. She only felt that her own love was not fully returned. She longed for something that she missed.

She lay awake schooling herself with severe reproaches.

"It is not his fault," she said. "He has not changed ; it is I who love him too much. He has gone about in the world since we parted, and has constantly met with fresh distractions to his thoughts, while I have stayed here brooding over my love till I have made an idol of it."

She could not free herself from this restless torture. "I cannot help it," she said. "I must go on forever loving him like this."

Morning, however, brought hope with it. She thought that she had judged too hastily.

"It may be the very strength of his love that has changed him. Ah, yes, it is so, doubtless, and when we are married these fits of moody silence will disappear, and his frank, loving nature will assert itself. I will not torment myself with doubts," she said almost gaily.

She found Louis alone in her little parlor. His greeting was warmer than it had been since her first arrival.

"I am going to Alost, my Clemence, to see my parents. I told you that they have a house there. I shall soon come back, and I shall bring my father and my mother with me."

It was hard to her to think of parting, and yet it seemed a relief that he was going away—this short separation might help them both ; but tears came into Clemence's eyes as she looked at her lover.

"It is only for a few days," he said, but he looked away from her towards the door as if he were in haste to depart.

A sudden impulse mastered Clemence. She did not stop to think whether it was a wise one—it seemed to force her to speak.

"Louis," she pressed her hands together tightly, "do not be angry with me; it is only love for you that makes me speak. Are you sure that you wish to be my husband?"

He stood looking at her; a faint flush came into his bronzed face.

"You are joking," he tried to laugh, but it sounded forced. "Is it likely that I should have come to claim you, Clemence, if I had not wished to be your husband?"

The door opened and in came Madame de Vos and Rosalie.

Clemence did not get another word alone with her lover.

CHAPTER V.

A STRUGGLE.

When Louis had started for Alost, Clemence seemed to rouse out of a very painful dream.

She smiled at her own morbid fancies. If Madame de Vos had not come in when she did, she had been ready to pour out to Louis a confession of all her doubts and misgivings.

Now all her energy seemed to return. The important articles of her trousseau had long been ready,—there were just a few trifles which required her attention, and she resolved to choose them during Louis' absence. She wanted Rosalie's help, however; she thought her young sister's taste was better than her own in such matters.

She went to her grandmother's room to look for Rosalie.

"Do you know where my sister is, grandmother?" she said.

"Your sister must not be disturbed," said Ma-

dame de Vos in an angry voice, but Clemence went on—

"I must find her, grandmother; I know she will like to go with me to Madame Grégoir's. She has to choose her own dress you know, and she can decide one or two things for me. No one has such charming taste as Rosalie has."

"Rosalie shall not be disturbed, I tell you;"—there was a very stormy sound in the grandmother's voice—"I will not have the poor darling teased. I will not, I say, Clemence,"—she turned a very angry face to the startled girl—"I tell you that you are a monster of selfishness. Is it not enough that the happiness of these two loving hearts is to be forever sacrificed to you, but you wish for your vanity's sake to rob the poor suffering innocent of the time she spends in weeping over her unhappy love?"

Clemence stood, alarmed and trembling; she felt sick with fear. Her grandmother's indignation brought a sense of guilt to her timid heart, and yet she did not know the crime of which she was accused. The haunting shadow of these last days came closer, seemed to crush her with its gloom; but she could not get out words to question her grandmother. She stood looking at the

old woman with the earnest imploring glance which had always power to irritate Madame de Vos.

The grandmother shook her shoulders and looked ill-used.

"Bah! bah! Clemence, you know what I mean. It is all very fine to look at me in that innocent way—as if you knew nothing; but you cannot have been so blind as all that."

"Blind! but what—what is it, grandmother?" the voice was faint and full of fear. Clemence felt as if she had been stabbed.

"Bah! bah! bah!" The old woman was lashing herself into fresh anger; those plaintive words had nearly turned her from her purpose. "If you are not wilfully blind, Clemence, you are indeed too selfish to see what everyone sees. What else, I ask you, could possibly have happened? Those two, Louis and Rosalie, were made for one another. You will buy Rosalie a gown for your wedding with Louis! Buy her a shroud more likely—the sweet child will die of despair."

Clemence started. She was fully awake now. She went up to her grandmother and took hold of her arm.

"You must speak more plainly, grandmother." Her hard, strained voice frightened Madame de Vos.

"Do you mean to say that Rosalie loves Louis?" An angry flush came on her cheeks.

"Yes, I tell you; but it is not her fault, she does not love him more than he loves her. Why should I not mean to tell you, Clemence? It is the kindest office I can do you." There was pity in her voice as she laid her other hand on the girl's clasped fingers. "I warn you while there is yet time not to force yourself on an unwilling husband. I speak for you as well as for them."

Clemence stood for a moment crimsoned; she felt almost suffocated with shame. Had Louis, then, never loved her? The warm blood left her face as suddenly as it had rushed there. She was very pale as she looked calmly at her grandmother.

"How do you know this?" She spoke so firmly that the old woman was cowed.

"I know it from the child herself. Besides, it was enough without this to see the change in Louis after you came back,—any one but you would have seen it."

"Ah!"—it was like the cry of some wounded creature, the grandmother's voice trembled as she went on speaking:

"Yes, it is so, Clemence, he has not been like the same man, poor youth. Surely it is impossible that

you thought he was happy? Well you have only to convince yourself; ask Elodie, ask any one of the servants; they will all tell you how happy Louis was with Rosalie till you came back. He could not bear to lose sight of her for a moment."

She paused for an answer, but the girl raised her head defiantly as if to repel any sympathy that might be offered, and then went away.

Instinct had taught Clemence long ago that she had a proud, high spirit; but this had rarely been awakened under the loving rule of her father and her mother.

Her grandmother's words sent her to her own room in a tempest of indignation that mastered her sorrow.

She locked the door, and then flung herself on her knees beside her bed.

"It is a conspiracy," she said, "a plot grandmother has made up to rob me of Louis." Then she hid her face, and a storm of passionate anger swept over her.

This did not last long. She thought of Rosalie's loveliness and of her own inferiority, and the contrast seemed to press like a chill hand upon her heart.

She did not suffer long from jealousy. There

must be hope to feed that agony, and soon Clemence became convinced that Louis did not love her, that he had never really loved her. Her vehement anger returned. His treatment of her had been a mockery, an insult. Her own passion terrified her; a tumult of vehement and new feelings seemed to be let loose in her; she could find in herself no power against them. Mechanically, and by a sort of instinct, she left the house and hurried to the old Church of St. Michael. She had been taken there once as a child to see the famous picture of the Crucifixion, and a consciousness that she should not be recognized in the far-off, quiet little church, helped to guide her there to-day.

She came into the church at mid-day, and went straight to the side-chapel in which the picture hung, and knelt down there. The old sacristan had noted the stranger, as he walked up and down the aisle. He wanted to go home, but he had become interested in watching the kneeling figure, and he sat down on a chair from whence he could watch what happened in the chapel. At first the woman knelt rigid, immovable as one of the statues around her, her face hidden by the falling black hood of her cloak. After a while the head was bent lower over the clasped hands, and the

whole body quivered with what seemed to be a tempest of sorrow.

The sacristan was tender-hearted; he got up and moved to the farther end of the church out of sight and hearing. Now at three o'clock he passed again by the chapel; the woman knelt there still, but her grief was hushed. Her hands were still clasped, but her head was thrown back and the hood no longer shadowed it. The sacristan saw a young face; it was tear-stained, but not sad; the dark eyes were fixed in loving contemplation on the picture above them.

"The poor soul has found comfort," he said. When he passed again the chapel was empty.

Clemence had stayed there till the tumult within her was quieted. She had struggled and prayed and meditated, and at last a calm, holy light shone into her troubled soul. She repented her anger; she resolved that, let the pain be what it might, she would give up self-love in this matter.

Even as she passed out of church something seemed to warn her not to put delay between her purpose and its execution. Instead of going home she went towards the railway station.

It was a relief to find that a train was about to start for Alost. Clemence drew her hood closely

over her head, and took her seat in one of the carriages. So long as the train was in motion she did not flinch from her purpose; but she soon reached Alost, and when she found herself on the platform she shrank from venturing alone into a strange town.

A feeling of unreality came to the girl, and she hesitated.

"Have I not been hasty and romantic?" she asked herself. "It is possible that my grandmother's story was false and exaggerated. Louis will be troubled that I have followed him to his own home."

She rushed back towards the station. If she at once retraced her steps, Louis need never know that she had come to Alost.

But while she stood hesitating she remembered his changed manner, and a sure conviction came to her that she had done rightly in following Louis.

Just then the chimes of Alost began to play and the sound cheered her. She looked round her and saw a little shop with sponges roped like onions on each side of the door. A stolid-looking man stood behind the counter staring at Clemence.

"Good-day," she said, bending her head. "Can

you tell me whereabouts Monsieur Scherer lives?"

"Monsieur Scherer," the stolid-faced man put his tongue into his cheek, and then he was pushed aside; a bright-eyed, apple-cheeked graybeard came forward to Clemence.

"Pardon, Mademoiselle," he said, "but my son is puzzled. There is more than one Scherer in the town of Alost. You ask, perhaps, for the Frenchman who has succeeded to the property of his cousin; he is the Scherer whose son returned from the French army this morning. Is it he that Mademoiselle asks for? *Tiens*, Mademoiselle, there he is—there is Monsieur Scherer, the lieutenant who has come back. See, there he walks along on the opposite side of the way."

Clemence looked and her heart seemed to be in her throat. Yes, it was Louis. For an instant she stood still, then she went out of the shop and Louis saw her.

He crossed over and stood beside her.

CHAPTER VI.

"I CANNOT."

"You here, Clemence? What is the matter? What has happened?" asked Scherer. Face to face with him, all her love returned; her courage fled, and for an instant or so words would not come to her.

"Louis," she said at last, but without looking up, "I want to speak to you alone, but I do not want to go to your father's house." He looked at her with wonder; he was bewildered by her strange behavior, and he felt an uneasy consciousness that she knew the truth. But her voice was so calm that it impressed him. He felt that he must do what she asked.

"Very well, come this way;" he spoke dully, and he went on into a small, deserted street. He was like a man in a dream; he did not see the curious looks of the father and son as they peered across the way between the ropes of sponges.

Presently he roused as a thought occurred to him.

"We have a fruit garden in the next street," he said, "and I have the key. I was going there for my mother. Will you come?"

She bowed her head. Soon they came to a high wall with a small green door at one end. Louis Scherer unlocked this, and Clemence passed into a large walled garden shaded by tall pear trees. Below these were rows of scarlet-runner vines.

The opening of the gate startled a troop of brilliant butterflies which had been enjoying themselves among the white and scarlet blossoms. The beautiful insects flew here and there and circled round the heads of the lovers as they stood facing one another just within the gate.

"Louis," Clemence said, quietly, "why did you not answer me truly this morning? Why did you not say—'I love Rosalie'?"

His eyes fell and he looked confused. Till then Clemence did not know that she had still cherished hope. It died before Louis spoke.

"What do you mean? You are unreasonable," he said sullenly. "I have given you no cause for jealousy; you are making us both unhappy for nothing, Clemence." He turned away, but she put her hand gently on his arm.

"Do not be angry with me, Louis. Listen, and you will be angry no longer. I began what I have to say wrongly. I met you so suddenly that I was agitated and my words escaped without my will. No, I have not come here to vex you. Oh, no, my Louis,—it is the last time I shall call you so—I came here only to set you free. I want you to be happy in your own way. Please do not stop me—no one shall ever blame you. I shall tell my father that our engagement is broken, that—that—in fact—I do not wish to be your wife."

A great struggle was going on in the man's heart. His recollection had come back. At Clemence's last words, he took both her hands in his; he looked agitated.

"Do you not wish it, Clemence?" he said, in pained voice. He held her hands fast while he waited for her answer.

A deep blush spread over Clemence's face and her eyes drooped. It was so hard to speak her own doom.

"No, I do not wish it," she said at last, and her sweet clear eyes looked full at him again. "You do not love me as I must be loved. Two years ago you thought you loved me; but you deceived yourself."

"It is you who deceive yourself; I loved you then, and I love you still."

She smiled sadly, "Well, we will say you loved me then, but now you have seen one who—who—suits you better,—and your love has changed. Stay; I do not blame you—only—if you had told me at once, at first, when—" she stopped; she remembered that she had resolved not to reproach Louis. She had borne up bravely, now the break in her voice conquered him.

He knelt down before her, and taking both her hands he covered them with kisses.

"Clemence,"—his voice sounded hoarse and choked—"I have been blind—mad—wicked even; I see it now. Pardon me if I yielded to a fancy,—It is not more. Will you not forgive and give me back your precious love?"

And while Louis said this he thought he was speaking truly. Clemence drew her hands away. This was the sharpest agony of all; and yet he must never know it; she would not falter now.

"Louis,"—her voice shook, but as she went on it steadied. "It is only your kind heart that speaks now. Listen: I should be wretched with a husband who could not give me all his heart, and then think what life would be to either of us. Rosalie loves

you, and you must marry her. In a few days at most you will have found out that you love her truly, and that it is no longer in your power to make me happy." She ended abruptly. "Now I must go," she said.

It seemed as if these two had changed characters. His loving, submissive Clemence was all at once a being to be reverenced as well as loved. Louis knelt still, he felt so infinitely abased before her; it seemed wonderful to him that he could have dared just now to kiss her hands. If she would listen to him, his weak heart still whispered.

"Clemence," he began, "give me one more trial. If you love me you will do this," and he took her hand again.

"I cannot," she murmured. She gently drew her hand away and she turned to the gate.

Louis rose slowly; he walked on beside her with bent head, and he opened the little gate in the wall.

"When will you return to the Golden Bear?" she said gravely.

"I do not intend to return there."

She gave him a look half-sad, half-smiling—a look that often came back to him. Then she drew

her hood closely over her head, and she went quickly back to the station.

Two hours later Clemence sat with her father in the vine-shaded arbor at the Golden Bear. Auguste was speaking in a loud and angry voice: it was long before he would accept Clemence's view of matters or accede to her wishes. At last her tears subdued his indignation and he left her to pace slowly and thoughtfully up and down the court-yard.

It was evening when the father and daughter met again in the arbor. The plash of the little fountain sounded plaintive in the stillness. Even the gnats had left off singing overhead. The landlord and his daughter had come out here together from the silent supper-table, and as yet neither of them had spoken. At last Auguste de Vos cleared his throat as if something choked his voice.

"My darling,"—he fondly stroked her dark hair,—"it shall be as you wish, but I tell you that but for you the false-hearted fellow should never again darken the old archway, for I can see exactly how things have come to pass in spite of your tender artifice. Elodie, it seems, was not so blind as I was while you were at Bruges, and she has spoken to me freely to-day. But if I am to consent to this ex-

change, let the fellow take Rosalie at once. I cannot forgive as you do, my child, and then when the house is cleared you will return, my best beloved, to be your father's comfort and blessing. I shall take you to Bruges to-morrow and leave you with Sister Marie.

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

THE old courtyard is once more full of brilliant light, but to-day it is not glowing August sunshine. The tall fuchsias in green tubs which border the court are scarcely in leaf; there are no flower-buds on the myrtles, though they have put out little tender leaves of expectation. The fountain sparkles, but the fish are not gambolling in the basin below,—they are still safely housed in the glass globe in Clemence's parlor. The sunshine disports itself chiefly among the roses and the lilacs, which atone just now for the shabby show they made last autumn by a perfect luxury of blossoms. Snowy masses with exquisite green-gray shadows between; lilac flowers, now rich in color, now delicate in perfume.

It is May, and yet the keen east wind lingers

so that it keeps Elodie the cook mindful of her rheumatic shoulder and unwilling to venture out of the warm shelter of the kitchen.

Elodie's dark clever face is full of vexation as she stands before a small table in the kitchen and strips off the leaves of crisp young lettuce plants.

"It is unbearable," she grumbles, as she deftly drops each crinkled leaf into the shining brass pan of water at her feet. "Mademoiselle Clemence goes beyond reason. I believe if Madame Scherer were to ask her for the gown she wears, Mademoiselle would take it off and send it to her. She almost broke her heart once to give Madame Scherer a husband, and that was quite enough to do for a sister—too much in my opinion,—but Mademoiselle should be advised; it is foolish to go on pouring wine into a full bottle."

At this Elodie shrugged her shoulders and shredded off the lettuce leaves faster than before. The cook has a clever head and a warm heart, but her temper needs a safety valve. It had this formerly when Madame de Vos managed her son's household. Elodie had disliked the stout, pink-faced dame, partly on account of the petty slights which she had put on her son's wife, but more especially for the unceremonious way in which she had

installed herself as mistress of the Golden Bear after her son's wife's death. In those days Elodie had always kept on her war paint, and, to say the truth, this constant habit of fighting had been in a way congenial to her.

But when, according to Elodie, the management of Madame de Vos had robbed Clemence of her betrothed, the cook told her master that the same house would no longer hold her and his respected mother, and that he must choose between them.

Auguste de Vos, however, needed no urging. He loved his mother, but he felt that she had helped to make Clemence unhappy, and therefore, on the day that Louis Scherer and Rosalie were married, the grandmother went back to live in her own house at Louvain.

"What a happiness, what a blessed relief," said Elodie on that occasion. "Mademoiselle Clemence will now take the place that she ought to have had when she lost her mother,—and Mademoiselle Clemence is an angel."

It may be that the principle which urged Elodie so constantly to brighten the shining pots and pans on her kitchen wall was thorough, and that it also led her to fear, too, that her tongue would grow dull and rusty unless now, in the absence of the

grandmother, she sometimes sharpened it against her master, Auguste de Vos, and even against the "angel," Mademoiselle Clemence.

There was a slight sound and Elodie looked up.

A black-cloaked figure was standing at the parlor door on the opposite side of the long arched passage.

Elodie came forward to the kitchen door.

"Mademoiselle Clemence," she said, shrilly.

"Yes, yes, Elodie, I'm coming," Clemence turned round, for her father was speaking to her.

Auguste de Vos is still stout and florid, but he looks younger, and happier too, than he did five years ago; now that he lives alone with Clemence he has the same blessed freedom from domestic worry that he enjoyed while his wife lived.

Clemence has a dexterous way of keeping the bright side of life turned towards her father. The little jars with Elodie rarely reach his ears. Auguste de Vos has never been a demonstrative man, but there has been, ever since that evening in the vine arbor when Rosalie's marriage was decided, a graver tenderness of manner towards his eldest daughter—something hard to paint in words, but which often kindles in Clemence a strong emotion and brings a sob and a smile together.

"Well, well," he was now saying, "I yield, if you say it is necessary, Clemence; only, I ask you to remember that Rosalie has three maids and only two children. It is, I confess, inexplicable to me when, considering all that my mother has done for Rosalie and her husband, that they cannot manage to nurse her now she is ill without asking you to go and help them."

Clemence smiled; her dark eyes shone brightly through her dark eyelashes.

"Poor Rosalie! You are severe, father; this is almost the first request she has made me since her marriage, and it is perhaps the beginning of——" She faltered; then she looked up frankly into her father's face. He is both father and mother to her now.

"You know Rosalie has never been quite the same to me since she went away."

Her father's eyes were wistfully tender.

"The fault is none of your making, Clemence."

"*Au revoir*, I must go to Elodie;" she nodded and crossed over to the kitchen. "Poor Rosalie is not yet forgiven," she thought.

She stepped down into the kitchen, and Elodie put her head on one side like a pugnacious sparrow.

"Hem! These are fine doings, Mademoiselle. Is it true, this that I hear,—that you are going to-morrow to Bruges to nurse Madame, your grandmother, who never once was good to you?"

"Hush, Elodie! you must not speak so of my grandmother."

Clemence's dark eyes looked reproving, and Elodie turned to the table behind her and spoke over her shoulder.

"I speak as I find, Mademoiselle. Duty is duty everywhere; and to me Mademoiselle's father, Monsieur, is of more value than Madame his mother, and Monsieur will be so sad without Mamselle to cheer him; whereas she—well, she would perhaps be a little neglected. Madame Scherer is young, and she loves her race, but she will be obliged to take care of Madame de Vos if Mamselle stays at home."

The woman's obstinacy aroused Clemence.

"I am going to Bruges for all that," she said decidedly, but with so bright a smile that Elodie was appeased.

"Now, I am going to see a friend of yours, the wife of the sacristan of St. Michael. I want to take her a little broth, some cold chicken, and a few eggs if you can spare them. She has no one

to cook for her, poor soul, and she is sadly weak."

Elodie gave a grunt as she went out, but she soon came back with a carefully packed basket, and then when she had watched Clemence into the place beyond the passage she came back shrugging her shoulders.

"It is all very well," she said; "God forbid that I should grudge the food and drink which Mamselle gives away so freely, but I ask myself what will happen to the sacristan's wife and all the other sick folk when Mamselle Clemence marries and goes away. Eh! she will marry some day, like all the rest, and the man will be lucky who gets her. I should think so, indeed. Well, well, it is a crooked world. She has used the poor sick people to those dainties, and I for one think that it will be harder for them to go without altogether than it would be if they did not have them now."

CHAPTER II.

DRIFTING APART.

Louis Scherer had left the army when he married, and had obtained an appointment at Bruges; and Rosalie soon found housekeeping so irksome that she persuaded her husband to let Madame de Vos live with them.

This arrangement was at first successful. Madame de Vos doted on this young couple. She managed the housekeeping and contributed liberally to its expense, but when two babies came one after another, disputes arose about the best way of managing these small treasures, and the discord between his wife and her grandmother amazed Louis Scherer.

Now Madame de Vos had become seriously ill, and he advised his wife to send for her sister Clemence.

"She will nusre Madame de Vos and take all trouble off your hands," he said to Rosalie.

Louis came to the railway station to meet Clemence. It was a year since they had met, and Clemence thought he looked aged and worried.

She had seen him several times since the marriage, and all remembrance of the old relations had been effaced by the new one. Perhaps the man still felt a certain self-complacency in the society of the woman who had once so dearly loved him, and perhaps the woman was somewhat blind to faults in him which were visible to all other eyes, but then Clemence de Vos was always indulgent to every one—unless it was herself.

She inquired for Rosalie and for the children, then she said: "How is our aunt,—does Rosalie see her often?"

"*Ma foi*,"—Louis twirled his soft moustache; he was very handsome and he knew it—"Rosalie may see your aunt, but she does not tell me about the visits. I have no special liking for Sisters. But here we are, Clemence, and see, there is your little god-daughter peeping out of the window."

They had come up a bye-street, which ended on the quay of a canal bordered on this side by a line of closely-planted poplars.

The newly-opened leaves quivered in the sunshine, and this was reflected from the tall red-gabled houses across the canal,—houses which went down straight to the water's edge and seemed to bend forward a little so as to get a view of their own full-length reflections in the yellow water.

Behind the houses rose the graceful tourelles of the Hotel de Ville; high above the rest was the belfry.

It was just three o'clock, and suddenly the carillon sounded out from the lofty tower, swelling with sweet throbs through the air above them, as if the angels were holding a musical festival in those melodious, unearthly strains.

Louis was too much accustomed to the carillon to listen to it as Clemence did; "There is your god-daughter," he repeated.

Clemence started from her rapt listening;—it had seemed to her that she heard her mother's voice up there among the angels.

Louis Scherer lived in a red-stepped gable house. There was a pointed gable window in the gable, with an arched hood of gray stone. The window mullions, too, were of stone. Below were two more such windows with a carved spandrel between; and from one of these lower windows

peeped a smiling cherub face—a miniature likeness, Clemence thought, of Rosalie.

Clemence kissed both her hands to the little maid, and then went in through the open archway below the windows.

There was the patter of little feet, a chirrup of treble voices, and then two baby-faces peeped from behind a green half-closed door on the left of the paved entrance.

Clemence dearly loved the children. She forgot where she was,—forgot even her grandmother's illness, and sat down on the doorstep with the two blooming darlings nestling in her arms.

The younger of the two, little Clemence, talked glibly in soft, incoherent baby words, but little Louis played at being shy, and hid his face in his aunt's black cloak, sometimes looking up with round, shining blue eyes, his pink, fat forefinger between his pouting lips.

Louis Scherer went on into the house to fetch his wife.

"Clemence, Clemence, where are you?"

Rosalie's voice sounded so shrill that Clemence at once put the children off her lap and jumped up from her low seat.

The sisters kissed affectionately, and then exchanged looks.

Rosalie said to herself—"How is it? Clemence grows younger-looking each time I see her."

Clemence thought that Rosalie looked aged and worried. She followed her sister upstairs, stifling the wish that Rosalie would look more simple. Madame Scherer had still her blonde beauty, but the Rosalie of the Golden Bear had been lovelier in her simplicity than the fashionably-dressed lady whose smile now seemed forced.

In the short minute that followed their greeting Clemence had seen little Louis shrink away from his mother and cling to his father's knees.

"You must come first to see grandmother," said Rosalie, "she asks constantly for you."

She led the way to the end of the upstairs gallery, and opened the door of Madame de Vos's room.

The walls were white,—so were the bed hangings, with white tufted fringe. The cushion in the window seat was covered with white dimity, the window itself was shrouded in white curtains fringed like the bed hangings. All this white served to bring out into yet stronger relief the deeply tinted pink face of Madame de Vos. She

stretched out one hand to greet Clemence; the other lay still on the coverlet powerless for evermore.

"Well, well, my child," she said, "you have come at last, then, to look at what is left of your grandmother. Ah, but say then, Clemence, is it to be believed that I, so active, and of so perfect constitution, should be lying here helpless like a silly old woman, while that imbecile, *la mère* Borot, who is at least ten years older than I am, ails nothing and walks as well as ever? *Ma foi*, I cannot understand how such things happen."

Clemance kissed the fretful face and seated herself at the bedside.

"You can stay a few minutes, Clemence," Rosalie nodded, "but no longer—I have so much to tell you."

Madame de Vos looked angry. "You are so selfish, Rosalie," she said peevishly. "You have Louis and the children; leave Clemence to me; I have no one—no one."

She closed her eyes with a weary sigh. Rosalie made an expressive grimace and crept out of the room. Clemence sighed too.

She and her father lived in such unbroken harmony, that this discord jarred her. She had only

come to Bruges twice since Rosalie's marriage, and when her sister had paid short visits at the Golden Bear she had seemed gay and bright. But she had no time to ponder over the change in Rosalie—her grandmother soon claimed her attention.

Madame de Vos related the history of her own sufferings with fullest details, and then she went on to complain of the neglect, vanity, and also of the bad temper, of Rosalie.

"And, Clemence, you will have to be careful, for she is very jealous, and she will not let you stay long with me lest you should love me best. It is the same with the dear children. Poor little darlings! they love grandmother and therefore they may not run to this end of the gallery, to my door; ah, it is not to be believed. I, too, who have done everything for Rosalie; I gave her a husband—everything; ah me!"

Clemence interrupted as soon as she could get a word in.

"Does my aunt come to see you, grandmother?"

"No, no one remembers me now; I am old and suffering and forgotten. When I had my own home at Louvain, as you know, I had plenty of friends, but then I did not fling my money away on ungrateful children. Why should Sister Marie

come to see me, I ask you? I have nothing to give her; Rosalie told me that Louis disliked seeing a *religieuse* in his house, so I told my poor Marie to stay away; and Clemence, between ourselves, you must agree that the sister is by no means an amusing companion,—she bores me with her talk."

Then she went back to the subject of her grievances;—such an unusual pleasure to the invalid to get so sweet and cheerful a listener that she would scarcely let Clemence go when the girl was summoned to supper.

Sounds of angry voices came from the dining-room. Clemence opened the door and met Louis coming out. His face was flushed.

"Good-night, Clemence," he said, "you and Rosalie will have to amuse yourselves. I shall see you to-morrow."

He passed out, and Clemence looked at her sister. Rosalie's fair face was heated and angry. She sat in sullen silence while she gave Clemence her supper.

"I find our grandmother better than I expected," the elder sister said, "the attack does not seem to have affected her speech."

Rosalie shrugged her shoulders. "You may

say that,"—she tossed her frizzled head; "I am very sure she has been telling you fine tales about me and my doings. Ah, I know," she went on, regardless of Clemence's attempt to stop her, "it is always I who am in the wrong; others may do as they choose, but they are sure to be right with grandmother."

Clemence's heart ached. It seemed as if there were no union in this household. A tender, motherly longing to comfort her young sister urged her to speak.

"How is this, Rosalie, she always used to love you best. Remember when people are ill, dearest, they become fractious and find fault even with their best beloved. I fancy this is grandmother's case."

Rosalie shook her head.

"It is useless to discuss it. It did not begin with this illness. Grandmother has become unjust and very selfish, and I do not wish to talk about her."

Clemence tried other subjects, but she soon discovered that it was not easy to find anything which Rosalie cared to talk about.

She would not speak of her husband or of her children. The only subject in which she seemed interested was a new toilette—a dress and a bonnet

she had been choosing for a *fête* to be held next week in the Botanic Gardens.

"You will like it so much, Clemence," she said. "There will be music and plenty of people. The officers will all be there," she blushed as she spoke.

"Thank you," said Clemence, "but I will stay with grandmother. Though she can talk, poor thing, she is quite helpless. I do not think she ought to be left alone till she is a good deal better."

"Just as you please," but Rosalie looked sulky again, and it seemed to Clemence best to leave her to herself.

CHAPTER III.

THE *fête* in the Botanic Gardens began at two o'clock. When Rosalie came in from church she ate something hastily, and then went upstairs to dress, leaving Clemence to give the little ones their dinner.

Madame Scherer came downstairs, beautifully dressed and in a flutter of excitement. Clemence had not seen her sister look so bright since she came to Bruges.

"Come, Loulou, make haste." Rosalie spoke cheerfully, without the fretful ring to which Clemence had grown accustomed. "We shall be late if you don't make haste."

She went to the window. It had already become a matter of course that Clemence sat between the two children, giving each its dinner.

"Ah! what lovely weather, and I was afraid it would be cold."

There was the glee of a child in Rosalie's voice. The door opened and her husband came in. He

was evidently aware of his wife's improved appearance. He looked at her admiringly.

"Is she not gay in her new bonnet?" he said to Clemence. "I am just come in time to escort you to the *fête*."

"Thank you," —Clemence started at the change in her sister's voice, and she saw the constrained look come back to Rosalie's face. "I have no wish to trouble you, Louis. I am sure you can easily find a more amusing companion. Besides, I have to take care of Loulou and little Clemence, and you will not care to be worried with them."

"As you please," her husband said, "but I suppose we can start together."

Louis spoke carelessly, but Clemence thought that he was wounded. He stood whistling, with his hands in his pockets, while the children were got ready.

Clemence sighed when they had all gone away. It had been sad enough to see the disunion between Rosalie and her grandmother, but this was worse. Was Louis really an unkind husband, and was this the secret of the change in Rosalie?

Her grandmother's bell rang loudly and roused her from these sad thoughts. She was soon beside the invalid.

"See how I am neglected," said Madame de Vos,—"left all alone;" and then she repeated the tale of her sufferings and of the wonderful patience with which she had borne them. Her next subject was the wealth of the Van Vroom's family and the privilege it had been to the house of de Vos to be in any way connected with such superior beings, and then she went on to her own virtue as a pattern mother and an untiring and devoted grandmother.

At last she paused for breath.

"I am glad the day is so fine for the *fête*," Clemence said.

Madame de Vos gave a grunt and turned her face away with a look of disapproval.

"Ta, ta, ta; you are glad, are you, that your indiscreet sister has the chance of playing peacock? I know how she is parading up and down in the sunshine." She turned her eyes to Clemence and she saw that she had grieved her.

"Listen, Clemence; I have a question to ask. If you were married to Louis, would it be necessary for you to be admired by all the officers in the town?"

Clemence gave a start of alarm, but in an instant she had begun to talk of something else. She

thought her grandmother was wrong to suspect Rosalie so unjustly and to utter such thoughts.

When she left the sick-room Clemence found that Louis had come home; he had brought Loulou with him.

Clemence found the child crying in her bedroom.

"Papa will not let me stay with him," he sobbed, "and mamma called me naughty in the Gardens. Oh! oh! Aunt Clemence, I am not naughty."

Clemence kissed him and wiped his eyes, and then she took him up to the playroom. It was large and at the top of the house. There was no fear that noise made there could reach mother or grandmother. Clemence always had a game of play with the little ones here, but to-day she stayed longer than usual. She romped with Loulou till she was tired.

The pretty, golden-haired little fellow was very loving. He was singularly intelligent for his age.

"I must go back to poor grandmother now, my pet, she wants me," Clemence said, "but you may come as far as the door with me."

The little fellow held her fingers tightly clasped as they came downstairs.

"You is a good fairy aunt; like that one in the story you tell us. It is always gay in the house since you came. I am never dull now."

They had now reached the grandmother's door, and when his aunt stooped to kiss Loulou he hugged her so tightly that her face was hidden in his golden curls.

Just then Rosalie appeared at the farther end of the gallery. She looked flushed and angry, and she went into her room without saying a word.

When Clemence went downstairs to supper she found Louis alone.

"I am not going out this evening," he said. "We are not to wait supper for Rosalie; she has gone to bed."

"Is she ill?"

"No; oh, no." He shrugged his shoulders.

"What is it?" Clemence asked herself. "What causes the constrained atmosphere in this house? It is dangerous to ask questions lest one should do mischief. Do Louis and Rosalie quarrel, I wonder, and is that why they speak so coldly to one another?"

Marriage was certainly different from what Clemence had pictured it, and then as she thought of her father and mother, she felt that there must be

something amiss in the relations between Rosalie and her husband.

These thoughts troubled her and kept her awake. She fell asleep towards morning, and when she came down and found the family at breakfast, Rosalie was pouring out coffee, and Loulou was seated close to his mother.

"Here comes our fairy," he said, then, when he had kissed his aunt: "Mamma, I have named Aunt Clemence our good fairy. If I am crying she makes me happy. I think she is like the sunshine,—the room is bright when she comes in, and then it is dark when she goes away. Mamma, why don't you be a good fairy, like Aunt Clemence?"

Rosalie was still pouring out coffee,—her hand shook, and the tablecloth was spoiled.

She turned a flushed face on Loulou and boxed his ears.

"Go upstairs, naughty chatterbox! See what mischief you have done?"

Louis Scherer looked up from his newspaper. He usually ate his breakfast without making a remark of any kind; but Loulou was his special darling.

"You are unjust," he said to his wife. "It was not Loulou who spilled the coffee."

Rosalie's eyes sparkled with anger.

"No; of course it is I who am always in fault—I am wrong with everyone."

She left the breakfast-table. Louis muttered an angry exclamation and then he smiled.

"Will you pour out your coffee, or shall I,—she will not come back," he said.

Clemence felt miserable.

"She will if you ask her. Go after her."

Louis raised his eyebrows. "Ah, you don't understand; it would be useless. You are not accustomed to Rosalie; she must be jealous of some one; it is a necessity to her. To-day it is of your influence with the little ones; it will be someone else to-morrow. It is better to leave her alone, I assure you."

When Clemence was sitting beside her sleeping grandmother, she thought over Louis' words.

"I do not agree with him," she said. "What will this 'leaving alone' come to at last. Surely every one of these disagreements must weaken love. And how they loved each other once; ah, if I could only see them happy again."

She heard a rustling at the door; she opened it gently; little Louis lay there, sobbing, curled up on the door mat.

Clemence stroked his hair, but the child shrank away.

"What is it, darling?" she caught him up in her arms.

"It is your fault now, dear aunt;" a look of relief spread over the child's troubled face. "Mamma says I am naughty to love you so much, and now it is you who love me, Aunt Clemence;" he twined his arms round her neck and whispered —"but I do love you best in the world."

Aunt Clemence was glad to hide her eyes among his golden curls. She was shocked and alarmed that Rosalie could thus teach her child evil, and yet she did not know what to do.

If she remonstrated with Rosalie it might cause a quarrel between her and her sister.

She was still hugging the child in her arms when Rosalie's door opened.

Clemence felt guilty when she saw the fair, frowning face, only for an instant, then she set Louis down.

"Run upstairs," she said, "go and play with little sister."

The boy looked from one face to another, and he hesitated.

"Go, Loulou," Clemence said, and he bounded upstairs.

"Why do you send him away, Clemence? When I asked you to come and help our grandmother it was not that you might rule my children and my house."

Clemence opened her bedroom door.

"Come in here, Rosalie," she said.

Madame Scherer had spoken in a loud, haughty tone, and Clemence looked towards one of the servants who was crossing the farther end of the gallery.

Madame Scherer followed her sister into the room, but she went on in the same tone,—"I do not care who hears me; I am not in the wrong this time; no mother can submit quietly to be robbed of the love of her children."

Clemence shut the door. "Listen to me," she said, in a firm voice. "You are not happy, dear, and your trouble makes you unjust. Children like new faces. If I were always here Loulou would not care for me, and it is just the same with grandmother. Why, Rosalie," she smiled tenderly at the fair, sulky face, "you know you were always the pet and the favorite with all,—no one could

help loving you; jealousy should never be one of your troubles."

Rosalie's eyes flamed with anger.

"You are as unjust as Louis is. I am not jealous, I tell you, neither am I vain. Surely, when I see every one preferred to me—when husband, and children too, desert me—it is time that I should feel it without being called jealous. I am not insensible, Clemence; cold, correct people do not know how warm hearts suffer." Tears filled the angry eyes, but she wiped them quickly. "It is useless for one to try to teach another," she said.

Clemence put her arms round her sister and kissed her flushed unwilling cheek.

"I did not mean that you have not sorrows, dearest, but it does not help you to brood over them. I sometimes think," (she smiled) "that some troubles are like eggs. If we leave them to grow cold they perish out of existence, but if we nurse them they gain strength and life. Why not go to your children now and play with them? They would do you good."

Rosalie drew herself stiffly away.

"Single women are apt to talk of what they do not understand," she said, bitterly. "I suppose I

shall next get a lecture on my behavior to Louis; oh, I am thankful all the same," she curtsied, and then moved proudly to the door. "Clemence," she said, as she opened it, "when next I want advice about my general conduct, I will ask for it.

CHAPTER IV.

IN WHICH MADAME DE VOS COMES BACK TO THE GOLDEN BEAR.

MONSIEUR de Vos passed slowly up and down the old courtyard, his head drooped forward, his hands clasped behind him, and between them he held an open letter. He had been walking up and down in perplexed silence for at least ten minutes —a silence only broken by the vociferations of Clemence's canary bird from his green and white cage hanging in one of the arbors.

The silence, however, was not solitude. Elodie stood watching her master from the kitchen door. The wind felt keen and easterly, but Elodie had forgotten her rheumatism ; she stood with her left hand clasping her waist, the fingers of the right hand pressed her lips firmly as if she was trying to keep in her words.

She remained dumb, but her face was full of defiance ; and she had already burst out, but had been sternly told to hold her peace ; but all the

remainder of the objections were ready on her tongue with a sure purpose of being spoken on the first opportunity.

The letter which Auguste de Vos held was from Clemence. She told her father that Madame de Vos was better, but that she needed change of air and scene, and Clemence asked leave to bring her grandmother home to the Golden Bear. Monsieur de Vos had read this part of the letter to Elodie, and the cook had taken upon herself to tell him that it was neither kind nor just to allow Mademoiselle Clemence to be plagued by her exacting grandmother.

"Hold your tongue," said her master.

In his heart, while he walked up and down, Monsieur de Vos felt the truth of the old servant's words. He knew that her grandmother had always snubbed Clemence, and that there would probably be quarrels between him and his mother if she came back. But he was too dutiful a son to permit Elodie's tongue such license, and had therefore checked her sternly.

"Mind your own business," he said, as a final rebuke.

At this Elodie muttered: "It is my business. but it ought to be yours."

At last he stopped in his walk and came up to his old servant.

"They will arrive to-morrow," he said, "You will see that their rooms are ready."

"Yes, Monsieur,"—the cook's face looked as wooden as one of the painted figures in the court-yard—"but I must speak before they come. I love you and Mademoiselle, and I would work my fingers to the bone for either of you, but I am too old to obey a new mistress you must then engage a new cook for the Golden Bear."

The master's face looked as hard as the cook's did.

"Elodie," he said, "you talk nonsense ; you are good and faithful, but at times you are also imbecile. Do you not know that you could not live away from Mademoiselle Clemence, and do you not also know that any other soup than yours would give me indigestion? There, it is ended ; I will not listen to another syllable."

He probably distrusted his cook's power of self-control, for he walked quickly up the arched entrance-way and stood looking out over the little place into which it opened.

Clemence's was not a complaining letter, and yet its tone troubled her father. Like many another

silent man, seemingly self-absorbed and indifferent, Auguste de Vos was keenly sensitive to the joys and sorrows of those he loved; his sympathy with Clemence was so perfect that he knew already her visit to Bruges had been unhappy.

"I shall not question her," he thought; "she will tell me as much as I ought to know. Clemence is good, but she has a gift that is rarer among women than goodness is,—she is wise—she knows when to speak and when to be silent."

Clemence and her grandmother arrived next day. Auguste de Vos was a good deal shocked by the change in his mother. She had not regained the use of her left hand, and she looked greatly aged, though she was no longer bedridden. When her son had taken her to her room and she found herself alone with him her tongue wagged freely.

"*Ma foi*, Auguste," she said, "it is good to be here—among peaceful and loving people; these last months have been passed in a tempesto f strife and jealousy."

"Of jealousy? I do not understand you, mother," for though he thought it possible she might herself create strife in a household, he felt puzzled about the jealousy."

"The good child has not then told you? You

do well to set store by Clemence, my son; she has greatly improved; she is now very like the angels. I assure you, however, that it is Rosalie's bad temper and jealousy that have driven her sister from Bruges."

Monsieur de Vos felt very angry. It was hard to hear that his good, patient child, after all her suffering, had been ill-treated by anyone. But that she should suffer unkindness from Rosalie, for whom she had given up the happiness of her young life, seemed to the tender father the utmost pitch of ingratitude.

"That is monstrous," he said; "and has Louis behaved badly too, mother?"

"No, my son, I do not complain of Louis," said Madame de Vos, "he is always kind and well-behaved. Perhaps he is not so much at home as he used to be, but what can you expect, Auguste? If a woman is jealous, and is always finding fault, a man will not always be patient; it is not to be expected."

"And I think, on the contrary, mother, that where two people love one another so soundly, that it becomes necessary to sacrifice another's happiness so that these two may marry, I—" here Auguste de Vos became conscious of his frowning brows and

irate voice and tried to smooth himself into a more dutiful aspect,—"well, all I can say is that I expect such a pair to be more than usually happy and loving together. But it is true in this, as it is in other things, ill-gotten goods are not worth having —they are sure to bring trouble along with them.

While her son spoke, Madame de Vos had put her handkerchief to her eyes. She was not crying, but she felt that her son's words applied to her personally, and that it behoved her to resent them.

"What is the matter?" Auguste de Vos said.

"You seem to forget, Auguste, that I approved of Rosalie's marriage. It is quite impossible with my experience, that I could be wrong in my judgment, and certainly," she said emphatically, "Louis was much better suited to Rosalie than he was to Clemence."

Auguste de Vos bent his head. "I quite agree with you, mother," he said. And this ended the discussion, though it did not end the anger of the landlord of the Golden Beor.

CHAPTER V.

THE OUTCOME.

At Bruges, meantime, the sad discords between the Scherers had become more frequent.

Till her illness began, Madame de Vos had taken all housekeeping cares from Rosalie; now that she had no one even to consult with, the young mother found her task too irksome. Her sharp temper made her servants dissatisfied and unwilling, and Louis Scherer complained bitterly of the discomfort of his home.

At last he said to his wife:

"If you would stay more at home, Rosalie, and look to the house and the children, instead of parading the Kanter like a peacock and chattering to popinjays, one might get a dinner cooked fit to eat."

Rosalie flew out in vehement retort.

"What next, I wonder," she said. "I was brought up to be waited on; I have never done servant's work, and I am certainly not going to

begin. It is too bad to say that about the Kanter." She spoke passionately, "I may speak to Captain Delake, or I may not; but I go to the Kanter to listen to the band, not to see him. It is quite different with you; you go out every evening to talk to Eugenie Legros!"

Louis shrugged his shoulders. "I am tired of this, Rosalie," he said, wearily, "you are always angry when I go to see Legros, but it has not occurred to me when I go to smoke a pipe with him that I might also amuse myself with his daughter. As you suggest it, I will perhaps try it. Adieu; I advise you to cultivate good temper."

But Louis Scherer did not go as usual to smoke a pipe with his old friend. Rosalie's temper had never struck him so unfavorably as it had this evening. She had grumbled for months past, but had never before spoken out so openly, so rebelliously.

She had parted in anger from her sister, and had told her that her visit had caused discord.

This was not true in the sense in which the poor jealous girl meant it, but it was true that the contrast of Clemence's character had made Louis more fully aware of his wife's ungentleness. Rosalie had grown into a habit of upbraiding her hus-

band for everything he did, and yet she felt aggrieved by his want of tenderness. On this evening Louis Scherer did not even give himself the solace of a pipe; he was deeply, thoroughly unhappy.

She will become worse and worse," he said. "Women's tempers do not improve with age." He sighed heavily.

"Who could have guessed that so sweet and blooming a girl as Rosalie was would ever have developed such peevish discontent and such a temper. What can I do?"

He paced up and down beside the canal. Lights in the distance twinkled among the trees and glittered faintly on the water.

A group of people had stopped to talk on the nearest bridge, and some of them were laughing merrily.

Scherer envied them. He thought of his wife's cross face and he shrank from going home.

Presently he stopped in his walk.

"Why do I endure this existence?" he said, moodily. "It is destroying me. My cousin Jaques, at Brussels, has often said he would like to exchange posts with me for a few months, if it could be managed. I have enough for myself and for Rosalie also; there need be no change in the

household. It is hard to leave the dear children, but it is better for a time at least. Anything is better than this daily strife. I will not submit to it. I will tell Rosalie my determination, then the next time she finds fault with me I shall write to Jaques."

Louis Scherer was by nature good-tempered; it did not, however, occur to him that in himself lay a means of softening and helping the irritable, exacting woman whom his cold manner fretted. He only told himself that Rosalie was changed; she was no longer like the girl he had married."

"I have more to vex me than she has, and yet I never begin a quarrel; and she is so vain and flighty, and extravagant about her dress. Oh, yes, I am quite tired of it."

He walked slowly back to his own door, telling himself that he was a very ill-used husband.

His next remark was not so true.

"It is my own fault for taking things so quietly. I will end the whole affair."

Rosalie was sitting where he had left her. She had been crying bitterly, but she did not choose that Louis should know this, and when he told her that unless they could live more peacefully he meant to go away by himself to Brussels, she lis-

tened in silence. Louis waited; he really half hoped for a reconciliation, but, as she would not speak, he turned away and went to see Legros.

Rosalie burst out crying again. She felt utterly crushed. In spite of her complaints she had believed in her husband's love. It was terrible to hear him threaten to desert her.

There was a tap at the door. A fine, portly-looking man, much taller than Louis Scherer, came in without waiting for leave.

It was Captain Delake; he looked disturbed at the sight of Madame Scherer's tears.

"Madame is in sorrow," he said impressively, and he sighed as he seated himself beside her. "It rust that nothing serious has happened to Madame," he said.

It appeared to Rosalie that she had not fully realized her husband's unkindness. She had given herself and her love to Louis, and he had actually threatened to desert her; and here was this grand gentleman, a grade higher in the army than Louis had ever been, troubled at even the sight of her sorrow. How tenderly he had spoken; he was full of sympathy, and only yesterday she had thought him old and swaggering when she saw him on the Kanter.

Her heart ached sorely, and at the captain's sympathy it relieved itself in a fresh flow of sobs and tears.

Captain Delake looked yet more tender and sympathetic ; he felt that he should like to "punch the head" of Louis Scherer if he had caused Madame's tears.

"Pardon me, Madame," he said softly, "may I not know what causes your sorrow ?"

Rosalie tried to check her sobs. "No, Monsieur, I cannot possibly tell you." A little quivering sob came ; but she wiped her eyes and felt ashamed of her wet face.

"Ah, Monsieur, please excuse me," she said, "I am the most miserable woman in the world."

"*Ma foi*, Madame, do not say that ; it makes me so sad. Will you let me try to make you happier ?"

The respectful tenderness in his voice soothed Rosalie.

"Ah," she thought, "if Louis would only speak to me like that," then aloud and very sadly, "No, Monsieur, no one can make me happy, I can never again be happy. My husband is angry with me, and I—I—I—" she began to sob again.

Captain Delake gently took her hand in his.

"The man who can grieve so fair and angel-like a being——" and then he stopped. The door was opened by Louis Scherer.

Louis looked very angry, but Captain Delake did not let go Rosalie's hand. He rose with admirable coolness.

"Good-evening, Madame," he said, "I am so pleased to hear better news of Madame de Vos. Ah! Scherer, where do you spring from? If I were not pressed for time I would stay and smoke a pipe with you, but as it is I say *au revoir*, my friend."

He was gone before Louis had recovered himself.

Rosalie's eyes had dried at once. She looked angrily at her husband, but her heart was full of fear.

Louis came forward and stood facing his wife.

"So," he said, after a pause, "this is how you spend the lonely evenings I hear so much about."

It was only the second time that Captain Delake had called at the house in Scherer's absence, but Rosalie felt too much outraged by her husband's suspicions to answer him reasonably. She rose up pale and trembling with anger.

"Silence, Louis," she said, "this is too insulting. For at least six months you have left me every

evening, and do you expect me to live always alone without society or sympathy? Even on the day of the *fête* you were angry with me because I spoke to my friends, and you left me to get home as best I could."

Louis had recovered his composure. He spoke in a calm, stern voice,—a new tone which completely frightened Rosalie.

"You are not wise to remind me of the *fête*," he said. "In this sad estrangement which has come between us, I have tried to avoid reproaches, I believe, because I was so weary of hearing them, and therefore I have been silent about your behavior at the Botanic Gardens. I was not, however, blind. I saw your vanity and folly, and your want of self-respect, and not only with Captain Delake. I left the *fête* without you, but not till I had asked you twice over to come with me. You refused. Well, Rosalie, on that day you took your choice between me and the gratification of your vanity; now I also make my choice between you and my peace. I cannot believe that I am necessary to the happiness of so vain and inconstant a woman."

Rosalie had softened at his first words but the last recalled her pride.

"It is too wicked to accuse me in this way," she broke out passionately, more to herself than to her husband. "He is to spend all his time away from me with others, and I am to be mute and meek, and I may not even listen to a word from another man. It is not to be borne—no, indeed; you spoke truly when you said you were not necessary to my happiness. I cannot easily be less happy than I am with you!"

"It is settled, then; you wish us to separate——" but Louis lingered and he kept his eyes fixed on the graceful head, so scornfully turned away from him.

"Yes."

Rosalie shrugged her shoulders; then she went suddenly out of the room, ran upstairs to Madame de Vos' bedchamber, and locked herself in.

CHAPTER VI.

SISTER MARIE.

THE fat, rosy-cheeked portress tapped at the door of the nuns' parlor in the convent of the New Jerusalem at Bruges.

"Will Sister Marie go to our mother?" the portress said, when she had been bidden to come in. "A note has come for the sister."

"For Sister Marie!" "*Tiens, tiens*, Marie, who is your correspondent?" Quite a little chorus of wonder and gentle joking buzzed round the quiet, sweet-faced sister who sat in a corner sewing. She was very busy repairing some point lace belonging to the convent.

"The mother is in her parlor," said the portress. She held the door open and looked reverently at the sister as she passed out. Sister Marie, in spite of her humble, retiring nature, had somehow inspired those among whom she lived with a conviction of her saintliness. She found the superior reading. Her room was like all the others, white-

washed, except that it was richer in pictures and statuettes. These were loving gifts from the pupils educated in the convent. The superior looked up from her book when the sister came in. She had a calm, peaceful face, not so sweet as the Sister Marie, but full of intelligence. She put an open note into the sister's hand.

"You must go to Rosalie; she wants your advice." Though the mother smiled, she looked troubled too. "You know I have always had fears about the poor child. This Monsieur Scherer cannot be a good husband to go away thus from his young wife and his children."

"Very well, I will go, mother," and then, when the sister had put on the black veil she wore out of doors, she took her way beside the canal to her niece's house.

Rosalie had impulsively written to her aunt in an agony of remorse at having driven her husband away from her. When, on the morning after their quarrel, she found that Louis had really started for Brussels, all her love for him came back. But she had not sent her note off at once, and by the time her aunt arrived Rosalie had cooled from this contrite mood. When Sister Marie tenderly kissed

her niece, instead of the remorseful penitent she had hoped to find, Rosalie smiled at her and seemed quite at ease.

But the sister had lived much among young girls, and she was not deceived by her niece's show of indifference.

"You are in trouble, dear child," she said. "What help can I give you?"

Her niece blushed under the sweet but direct look in her aunt's beautiful eyes. She stood twisting her fingers together, angry with herself, with Sister Marie, and with everyone.

"I am sure I don't know," she said fretfully. "I hardly know why I wrote to you, only it seemed as if I must tell someone how I have been treated, and I did not want to tell my father. He would say it was my fault, of course, and so would grandmother. It is sure to be my fault always with some people."

She tossed her head and laughed.

"My poor Rosalie," her aunt gave a cheerful smile. "I fancied from your note that you were sorry about something that had happened." She waited, then she said, "What has happened, my dear child, to make your husband go away?"

"You had better ask him." Rosalie looked de-

fiant, but at the tender pity she saw in her aunt's eyes a sudden irrepressible sob rose in the girl's throat. Next minute her fair head was on Sister Marie's shoulder, and she was sobbing as if her heart would break.

"It is not my fault, indeed it is not," she sobbed. "Louis is so cold, so selfish; he does not care for me; he is enough to break a woman's heart, with his cool, indifferent ways; and then because I let others talk to me and admire me, ever so little, and only to sting him into being more loving, he says I am given up to folly and vanity, and—and —he has left me."

The words had come in little broken phrases between her deep sobs, and Sister Marie had not interrupted her niece; she knew that the girl must pour out all her sorrow; the wound would not close while any poison lingered in it.

But while she listened the sister's pure soul was troubled. She had thought of Rosalie as one of the sinless lambs of the convent flock, and it seemed woeful that this young wife should even wish for the admiration of a man who was not her husband.

"It is not my fault; I am not to blame," Rosalie

repeated, but this time the words sounded like a question.

Sister Marie smiled.

"Dear child, the hardest thing we have to bear in life is our own blame; we are so lazy, Rosalie, that we usually try to make someone else carry it; and yet," she spoke more gravely, "the nature of love is to bear all for the sake of the one beloved, —is it not?"

Rosalie did not understand, but she looked uneasy.

"You see, dear child," Sister Marie spoke in a cheerful, confiding tone as if she were full of quiet gossip, "we who call ourselves Christians have all got to bear our cross in one shape or another; is it not so? We have been shown the way, and if we will we may follow in every footstep of that way; but it is useless to put our burden on others, —each must carry his own.

Rosalie's head moved restlessly. She put her aunt in a chair and seated herself beside her. She wanted sympathy and condolence, and it seemed to her that Sister Marie was reading her a lecture.

"There is no use in telling me this, aunt. Even while I was at the convent I never cared for this kind of talk, and I like it less now. I can't under-

stand it; you see I am quite different from Clemence. She is so calm; she has no burden to bear, I suppose, or she could not be so cheerful and happy. Ah! there are people who have not feeling enough to be unhappy."

She spoke so bitterly that Sister Marie sighed.

"You are mistaken, dear child. Clemence has a great deal of feeling," she said, "but I think she feels more for others in their troubles than she does for herself. Perhaps it is because she carries her burden so willingly that she is able to be bright and happy; directly we begin to consider and to bewail a hardship, it grows heavier, my child, and we rebel against bearing it at all."

"But I do bear; see how much I have borne already." Rosalie was carried out of her sulky reserve by the wish to justify herself in her aunt's opinion. "Louis has left me evening after evening and I have not complained."

"But have you been loving and tender to him, Rosalie? Has he been much in your thoughts? Have you shown him, dear child, that his comfort and his happiness are your chief cares?"

Rosalie's blue eyes opened widely. It was almost laughable to hear a quiet, staid sister like her aunt Marie instructing her in the art of loving her

husband, just as if there were a principle in it.

She gave a little toss of her frizzled head.

"Of course I love Louis, but I should be wanting in self-respect if I made no difference when he takes no care to make me happy. Besides, it is my duty to tell him of his faults."

Sister Marie smiled.

"If you and Louis saw one another on opposite sides of the canal, you could not clasp hands across it, Rosalie. One of you would have to cross the bridge and seek the other; eh, is it not so?"

Rosalie's face had become red with anger.

"Single women cannot judge for us married ones, aunt; I mean no disrespect. I told Clemence so. Surely you would not have me follow my husband to Brussels and ask his pardon for what is his own fault?"

"Yes, I would have you do this, Rosalie." She looked grave, but there was a tender, persuasive tone in the words. "Learn your own heart, my child—you know what I mean,—and try to see if all the blame rests with Louis, and if it does, remember that those who are in the right are always more ready to be reconciled than those who are wrong."

Rosalie shook her head.

"I think," her aunt said gently, "that you will be unhappy, and wrong too, if you do not seek to be reconciled to your husband."

Rosalie stamped with vexation at the sight of her aunt's serious face. "It is too bad! too bad! You are as hard as all the others. Everyone is so unjust; I am always to blame."

Sister Marie did not notice this outburst. She asked after the children, and then she got up to go away. "I will come again if you wish it, my dear child," she said. "I fear I have not given you any comfort to-day."

"I have been at least able to make you sure of one thing," Rosalie said. "You know that I love Louis. I may not have told him so, but I feel it all the same, even when I am most angry with him."

Sister Marie smiled again.

"But, Rosalie, how is your husband to know this. I do not think I could believe in the love of a person who often spoke angrily to me. 'A plant that puts forth no leaves is counted dead. Love must exercise itself in deeds and words, or it cannot live—its root will wither. Good-bye, dear

child. Pray for yourself and for your husband, and all will be well."

She kissed Rosalie very lovingly, and then she went back to the convent of the New Jerusalem.

"A good thing she has gone," the girl burst out; "I shall not be in a hurry to send for her again."

Rosalie dressed herself and went out for a walk. She noticed that her neighbors stared at her from their windows. Presently she saw two women she knew put their heads together and whisper, and when they came up to Rosalie they looked full of condemnation.

"Let them chatter," she said, haughtily, and just then she met Captain Delake face to face.

A burning flush rose in her cheeks. She bowed in answer to his greeting, and hurried on so fast that he could not get the chance of speaking to her.

Rosalie walked on absorbed in thought. It was strange, but though she knew that her aunt was only a sister, a woman who, as Louis always said, lived a shut-up, secluded life, which deprived her of any power of judgment, yet Sister Marie's words stuck to her niece as though they had been burs.

Rosalie found herself pondering them even after she went to bed that night. What was it her aunt had said about love in deeds and words? "Love?—what is this love she talked of?" thought Rosalie, sleepily. "I love Louis; is not that enough? What can she mean by 'showing love'?"

CHAPTER VII.

WITH THE ANGELS.

It is a pouring wet morning. Louis Scherer sits before his breakfast in a *café* and listens to the drip-drip of the rain on the veranda.

He has as much peace as he can desire in his Brussels life, but for all that he is not happy; there is a want at his heart which he never felt in his bachelor days.

Would it not have been better, he thought, to have spent at least some of his evenings with Rosalie?

He has been asking himself this question over and over again, and he cannot find a satisfactory excuse for himself.

"The great quarrel between us was about those visits to Legros," he thought. "I certainly might have been more at home," and then he wondered what Rosalie thought of his absence.

"She was foolish about that Captain Delake;" the remembrance of this made him feel very angry.

His cousin had received him coldly. Louis's sudden arrival had disconcerted the orderly Fleming, and he said he could not listen to a proposal to exchange posts. He, however, found a temporary employment for his cousin, which did not suit Louis half so well as his own position at Bruges had done. Louis had got leave of absence for two months, but that time had nearly elapsed, and he did not know what to do.

He could not go home unless Rosalie asked him to do so. But he could not sit any longer over his breakfast this morning; time was up and he must go to his office. Monsieur Scherer stretched himself, yawned and departed. When he reached his office the porter handed him a card.

"A lady has been here for Monsieur; she was very anxious to see Monsieur, and she is waiting at this address."

A strange feeling of expectation came to Louis. "Who was the lady?" He looked eagerly at the card and he was disappointed. On it was written "Clemence de Vos," and the name of a hotel close by.

Louis's hand shook as he read. Why had Clemence come? What news had she brought from Bruges? He did not dare to conjecture as

he hurried on to the hotel named on the card.

Clemence met him at the door. She held his hand while she spoke.

"I am come to fetch you home, Louis; I have bad news to tell."

He could not speak—he only looked eagerly at her; there was shame as well as anxiety in his face.

"It is not Rosalie," Clemence said, quickly; "she has been ill, but she is better. She would have come herself, but, Louis, she cannot leave home—Loulou is ill—very ill!"

"Tell me—he is not dead?" Louis spoke hoarsely. Clemence's sad face had filled him with the agony of a new and sudden fear.

Was this mad freak of his to end in such a grief?

"No, he was living when I started this morning, but we must hasten, Louis, for I fear. It was a sudden attack—a kind of fit, I fancy, and the doctor said I must fetch you quickly."

Louis Scherer went with her mechanically to the station; he even let her take his ticket for him while he stood absorbed in his fast-growing dread.

Perhaps he had not known before how closely the child had got twined round his heart; but it seemed as if a strong cord was tugging there hurrying him back to Bruges.

"Oh, that I had never left him!" This thought came over and over again, but he did not utter a word. He leaned back beside Clemence; he seemed to be listening to all she said, and yet at first he scarcely heard a syllable.

"Rosalie has been very ill," the soft, tender voice said. "Oh, so ill, Louis. They heard of her illness at the convent, and they sent for me; she is not strong yet." Then after a pause Clemence went on—"Do you know why she wished to get well and strong, Louis?"

The direct question roused him, he looked at Clemence.

"She was anxious to go to you to ask you to come home; she is very sorry, and I think her grief caused her illness."

He still did not answer; his thoughts stayed a little while with Rosalie, but the strongest feeling in Louis Scherer's heart was love for his children—he was impatient to be with Loulou.

It seemed as if the train would never reach Bruges; and when at last they were fairly on their way to his house, his agony grew so strong that he leaned back in the cab and covered his face with his hands. Clemence went in first, and she beckoned him to follow her upstairs, then she

led the way along the gallery to his wife's room. They noiselessly entered.

Rosalie was kneeling beside the bed—one arm was round her child.

Loulou lay there, very pale and still; his eyes were closed, but presently he opened them and looked at his mother.

His father bent forward and he saw the purple rings under the widely-opened eyes and the death-pallor on the sweet little face, but Loulou's eyes remained fixed on his mother.

"Kiss me, darling mamma;" the little voice was so faint, so weary, that it seemed far far off to the two listeners. "And kiss dear papa when he comes; he will come--dear—dear mamma——"

The eyes closed and opened again. There was a little faint fluttering, and then all was still. Loulou was gone with the angels, gone away from his mother's tears and his father's agony of sorrow, and yet it may be he was closely present, praying for them in their sore trial.

Clemence stole softly out of the room. There was perfect silence awhile, and then the man's sorrow burst from him in deep, struggling sobs.

Rosalie looked up from her silent weeping—she had not realized that her husband had indeed

come back, and in the unlooked-for joy her new sorrow was hushed.

She went to him, she took his hand, and tenderly kissed it; then she clung to him.

"Louis, my Louis," she whispered, "forgive me. I will try and love you as well as Loulou loved."

CHAPTER VIII.

REUNITED.

THE rainy weather has passed away; the sky is bright and clear. Just a few soft, gray-tinted, fleecy clouds take all hardness from its deep blue; but those days of heavy rain have spoiled the roses in the old courtyard: they hang their heads like a drenched mop.

But the birds sing out loudly in their cages; they are saying that the rain has brought a genial warmth into the old courtyard, and the vine leaves have found this out too, and are shaking themselves free of their brown sheaves with surprising quickness. The fountain, too, sparkles merrily in the sunshine, and seems to be calling for its playfellows, the gold-fish, to disport themselves in its basin.

Clemence stands in the middle of the courtyard; her mourning dress looks sad in contrast to the brightness overhead, around her, but there is no sorrow in her sweet, dark eyes.

Every now and then they turn to the arched passage with a look of expectation.

Clemence is not looking at Elodie, however. Elodie stands outside the windows of the little parlor, with her arms akimbo, chatting with Madame de Vos, who is almost as fat and pink as ever. The cook of the Golden Bear has evidently softened towards the visitor; at this moment she is actually instructing Madame on the most approved method of cooking chaffinches.

A sound of wheels at last—they come rattling over the round stones of the place, and Elodie makes a precipitate retreat to her kitchen. It does not comport with her love of consistency that her master should find her chatting amicably with her old foe.

Madame de Vos, too, shuts down her window, so as to keep up her character as an invalid.

Clemence goes forward to meet her father under the archway; he draws her hand fondly under his arm, and they come back together into the old courtyard.

"Well, father?" Clemence still looks expectant.

"It is all right, my darling." Auguste de Vos smiles down into her questioning eyes. "I had a long talk, first with Louis and then with Rosalie.

It is quite like old days with them. They seem very happy. The most hopeful sign about her is her loving gratitude to you, Clemence. She said to me, "Tell her I long for her forgiveness, and tell her that I owe my happiness, in this new life with Louis, to her sweet, unselfish love."

"Hush, father," but Clemence's eyes are full of tears as she raises them in fervent thankfulness.

Her father kissed her forehead.

"I am not afraid of spoiling you, my child. What I say is only the truth, but I should like to learn your secret; it could have been no easy matter to win poor, froward Rosalie to feel as she now feels—that a wife is made for a husband, not a husband for a wife. Eh, what is your secret, child?"

"I have no secret, father," Clemence laughed softly. "I only love Rosalie dearly, and I think she has learned to believe it."

THE END.

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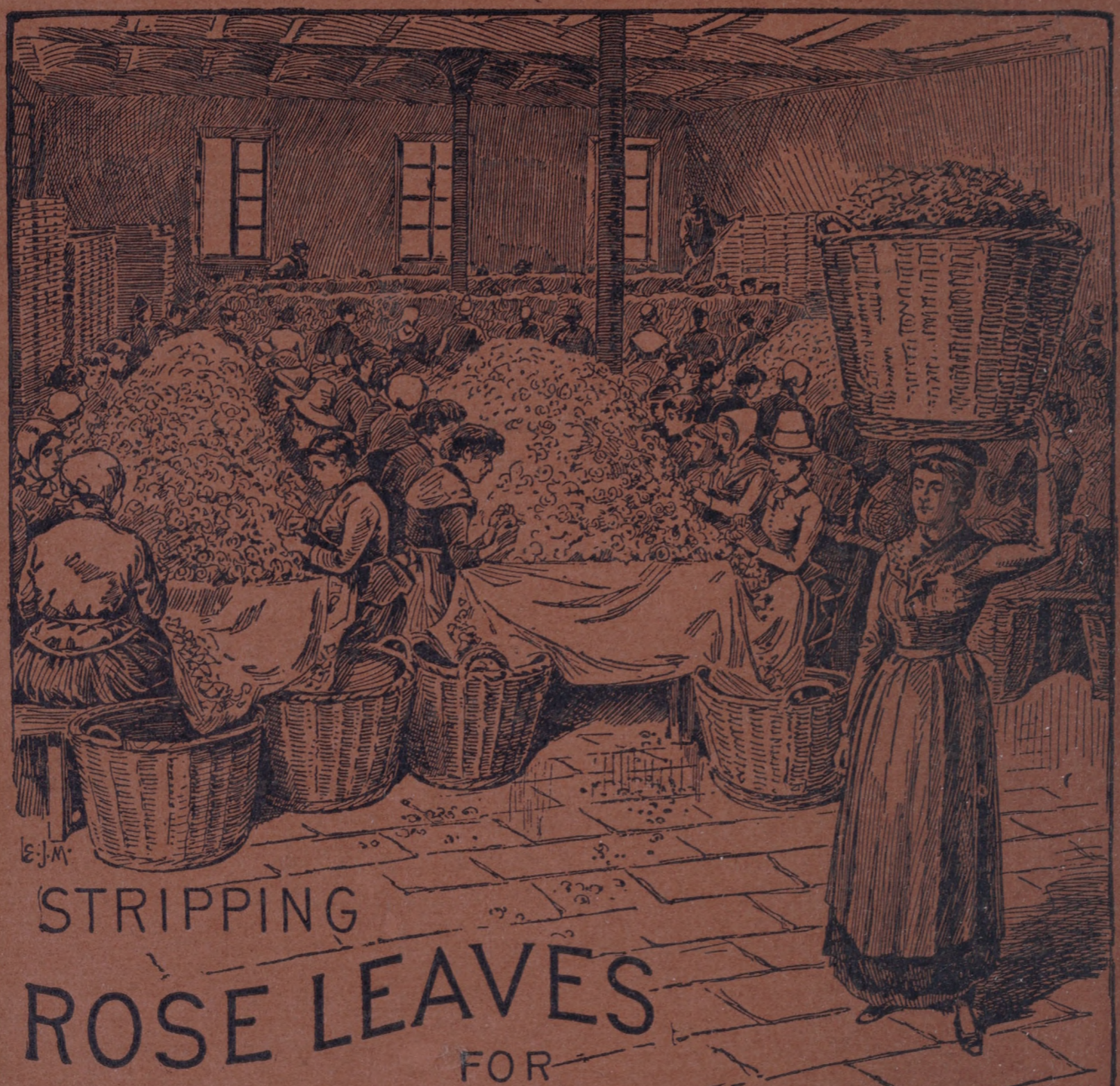

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